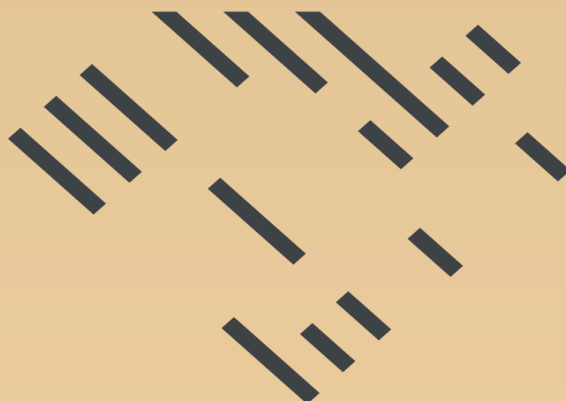




*Issue 1.1 Q1 2017*





# **ΔMagazine 1.1, Spring 2017**

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Special thanks to Corey Hoard, Logan @Redmensch, Alyson Escalante, Marisa Suarez, every single mom, and all of our contributors, without whom this would be an empty packet of papers.

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*"The philosophers have only interpreted the world.  
The point is to change it."*

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*"We have a duty, those of us in academics," says Harvey, "to change our mode of thinking."*

*We at  $\Delta M$  find this a salient point, although we would challenge it. This is a duty not just for "those of us in academics" but for all of us — the creation of new concepts and new ideas must take place in the everyday lives of those invested in the struggle against global capitalism. In that vein,  $\Delta M$  was arranged as a space for reflections on the practical application of theory to this struggle, or the development from the margins of novel systems which can account for the experiences of the marginalized. It was with these aims that we set out to establish this journal as one platform among others where such discussion could take place.*

*We began with lofty ambitions; our first quarterly issue of  $\Delta Mag$  sought to compile works from various internet-based and other non-traditional contexts, emphasizing the particular capacity of those spaces to produce radically new ideas emerging from the urgent conditions of contemporary neoliberalism. What we instead faced was the frustration of theorizing about everyday life from its own trenches, and so we delayed.*

*As an exercise in self-criticism, but also in order to express how we are situated within the configurations of capitalism, we would like to be transparent: we are a small staff of workers and students faced with the mounting pressures of a world arranged against people like us, from rising rents, wage struggles, police brutality, and gendered violence, to the steady advance of imperialist forces and the consolidation of power by the international owning class. In a word, we simply didn't have time.*

*For many of us, concerns about reactionary forces — from Duterte to Trump, from the Golden Dawn to the Front National— have been paralyzing. Whether or not this is to blame for our failure to meet our original timeline can be left up to the reader. For all that, we nevertheless feel that this collection we are presenting to you is far beyond anything we could've originally intended.*

*In this inaugural issue, we have compiled pieces speaking to the current US political climate, reflections on new feminisms and anti-racist thought, and investigations into the temporalities of mass media, among other works of political economy and theory. Doing so, we hope to contribute to an ongoing discussion. We realize that the content of this particular issue is broad; that is by intention. In future issues we hope to narrow our focus and engage more particular discourses, themes, and problematics.*

*2017 will mark the 150th anniversary of Volume I of Marx's *Capital* and the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution— regardless of your stance on either, it's undeniable that these were critical moments to the fight against capital. This year provides an opportunity to reflect on the history of that struggle, both practical and theoretical. We hope that our forthcoming issues will allow us to articulate those reflections and synthesize new ways of thinking, being, and resisting.*

*We'd like to thank our readers and contributors. Everything we do is made possible by and for them. We look forward to hearing your responses to the works we've gathered here and to continue the conversation of which this project is only a part — a ruthless criticism of all that exists.*

*Finally, we'd like to express that the positions developed in the following pages are not necessarily endorsed or shared by our editorial staff.*

*In solidarity,*

*$\Delta M$  Staff*

# Black Existentialism (Part 1)

Blackness and Imperialist White Supremacist  
Capitalist Patriarchy  
M.I. Jazz Freeman

"That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality" -Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man

## I. Introduction

It is impossible to underestimate how saturated the concept of "blackness" is in our Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchal social environment today. Imperialism is the advanced colonial capacity of governments to exploit people and diasporas, demanding assimilation to a global economic system and deference to military authority. White Supremacy is the racist power dynamic that ideologically, institutionally, and economically values white lives above black, brown, and other non-white people to build, protect, and further strengthen the power and privileges of white people. Under this guiding principle, Imperialism more effectively attacks and oppresses black and other POC globally, justifying itself as a benevolent and valid power. Capitalism describes the economic system which fuels and enables Imperialist growth and white supremacist power. Capitalism is the economic configuration of institutions, people, and land that support a state, which all but totally, monopolizes the use of violent force with the exchange of currency. This basic relationship is the foundation upon which the subjects of capitalism are motivated to use currency as described by the legal articulation of rights that justify and reinforce capital. Patriarchy describes the techniques of socialization and behavior prescription that elevates men above women in everyday social life. Patriarchy is the fundamental social relationship upon which all other exploitative hierarchical power relationships have developed historically. It allows the dissemination of power to be distributed throughout the population on a wide range of scales, prescribing power to patriarchal male identity, authorizing the use of that power in a fundamentally repressive way. The combination of all of these dynamics into a globalized system is the pretext upon which IWSCP exploits black bodies.

Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy does this in the abstract when discussion and portrayal of black people in media separates positive connotations from "blackness," instead, suffusing and saturating "blackness" with negative attributes and associations. IWSCP authorizes its own power by modeling techniques of dehumanization and orienting white supremacist temperaments towards blackness for the dominant white gaze (that is the perspective of white individuals who observe and interact with black people). The white gaze battles for control over how black people express and react to their subjective experiences in a colonized world. How black people live and experience blackness is black subjectivity, which is under constant attack.

Black people uniquely engage with environmental circumstances, socio-economic landscapes and assimilatory social relations. Scrutinized by white subjects, we learn to anticipate distrustful questions and apathy, while rarely

succeeding in locating spaces and representations that facilitate empathy for black existence. Our reality, our subjective experiences of blackness are always known, seen, and utilized implicitly and explicitly. Black existentialism is that specific mode of being within Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy that enables black people to recognize their own humanity and unveil the artificial conceptions of blackness. In this way, black existentialism is acknowledging the degree to which we are invisible in an exploitative world. We mitigate our visibility as a matter of survival and we struggle to be recognized in our totality as human beings.

Very early on, we are taught to second-guess ourselves, mask behaviors and feelings that are most likely to be warped, erased, or mangled by the white gaze. Continually exposed to a gazing white subject, we come to expect its presence in our daily lives. The white subject, participating in the white gaze, has the unique privilege of existing within a social reality that assigns primacy to white agency over all others. Fortunately, despite the expansive apparatus of erasure, black people are not objects and subsequently observe the techniques of subjugation utilized by the gazing white subject. How we communicate our perception of this oppressive reality is the substance of the black oppositional gaze.

At the same time, blackness is empowering, beautiful, and embodies community wherever black people are able to time and secure spaces that are not suffused with oppressive racism. In reality, simply acknowledging the extent to which the development of Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy consistently erects structures and techniques of power that disenfranchise blackness illustrates the strength of black subjectivity and its ability to erode and threaten white hegemonic social order.

This complex network of people and power dynamics is what makes "blackness" a very saturated category. That is to say, "blackness," as a concept or signifier, is immensely rich with condensed notions and narratives that are intended to describe black bodies. While the cultural discourse around blackness is largely dominated by the total effects of power wielded by Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy, blackness is also saturated with the meanings and experiences of black people.

Black Existentialism is the precarious position of black people wherein our subjective experiences of blackness are juxtaposed with external perceptions of blackness that are projected upon us. In this way, black people are never truly seen by the white gaze or by white hegemony as a culture, but are erased by the very categories prescribed to and projected upon black bodies.

## **II. Navigating the White Gaze**

Because strategically navigating the white gaze is a matter of survival, we are compelled to pick and choose our battles or, rather, those moments when it is advantageous and necessary to disrupt the white gaze to explicitly reveal our oppositional gaze. As Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy makes violence normalized in everyday life, it produces fear for the black people who grapple with whether or not to step outside of the boundaries "respectability" creates. Wherever we express ourselves, we are calculating risks involved with doing so. These internal struggles and decisions are made invisible by hegemony as much as possible in order to preserve and reinforce white apathy.

The permutations of being—the stereotypes, the victim blaming narratives, the dehumanized criminal, and other fictional caricatures are a burden



shouldered by black people who navigate the white gaze. We simultaneously carry everything we are not and everything we are within ourselves at all times.

We are encouraged to assimilate to the standards and values of a hostile exploitative social environment supported by a number of institutions. Our subjectivity is erased wherever it is evaluated by the white gaze. At all times, we are expected to disclose that which is not known by white people about blackness. That which cannot be digested or understood is dismissed as a non-existent or imagined dimension of reality. Our emotional sentiments are scrutinized by the degree that which they discourage acceptance of the Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchal status quo that oppresses black people economically, psychologically, and physically. Apathy is deployed where there are appeals for sympathy or empathy. Empathy is deployed only after black subjects affirm the validity and necessity of IWSCP as a system. Only where there is black deference to the mercy of the white gaze and its supporting white supremacist institutions does respectability win white sympathy. When this paternalistic power dynamic is affirmed, the black subject is made into an object of false generosity. This transformation allows existing power dynamics to be reified in the public discourse on race.

Situated between the racist white gaze and the mechanisms of capitalism, there is a perpetual war waged against the way that blackness is allowed to appear. For the white gaze, blackness is always an attribute of otherness. The actual subjectivity of blackness is not known or understood by the white gaze. Where black people express themselves in view of the white gaze, their behavior is seen as stemming directly from white hegemony's cultural understanding of blackness. Whiteness, with exclusive ownership over the white gaze, shapes itself to have a unique position towards blackness. It places itself above blackness in order to prioritize its own view of black people as subordinate or dehumanized. This relationship is what allows race to emerge as a caste based system that functions in concert with class.

In this way, blackness is objectified by the white gaze into a commodity full of white misconceptions and "otherness." As a black "other," black subjectivity is denied humanity and the paradigm of white supremacy claims mastery over public perception of blackness.

In this historical period, following chattel slavery, global colonialism, and the continued development of white supremacy, black people have been forced to navigate a social reality where their humanity is perpetually questioned and scrutinized. As the aspirations modeled by IWSCP for white people appear, they gradually eclipse black conceptions of liberation with bourgeois notions of success. White privilege is inextricably bound to the same processes that create racial categories, and to be white means entitlement to white privilege.

Pressured to assimilate, many black people then internalize the view of blackness from the perspective of the white gaze. There are material incentives to deny or at least mask the existence of black subjectivity, by prioritizing the white view of blackness. Those attributes which are permitted by the white gaze to exist and find expression in black people can then be identified as "respectable." While respectability is still subject to racism and hostility, this category of blackness is afforded more privileges than the black person who expresses their subjectivity, their lived experiences with a black body in a white supremacist world. These prescribed respectable roles fail to liberate black people who are oppressed, exploited, and murdered by the hegemonic social order. This is contrast to radical expressions of blackness of that challenge the legitimacy of a social landscape supported by Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy.

This is not to say that the agency of black people disappears once the white gaze is internalized or when assimilation is embraced as a survival option within society. On the contrary, blackness shaped for respectability requires an acute awareness of this situation because it involves consciously grasping at the white gaze as a tool. The black subject who internalizes a racist self-view manipulates their subjectivity by shaping themselves such that they may pass across the white gaze with minimal resistance. The subjectivity of black people is never actually negated, it is only made less or more visible to the white gaze. In this relationship, black people decide the degree to which they are visible while the white gaze attempts to control how black visibility is understood and contained within a cultural perception of respectability.

Gripping with the dehumanizing ability of the media, government, and capitalists, many black people, with aspirations of bourgeois success within the existing conditions of exploitation and oppression, internalize contradictory perspectives embedded within "blackness" in the interest of survival. So accustomed to the white gaze, white supremacy becomes permanent element of reality that is virtually inescapable. This psychological phenomenon, where the perception of being watched is enough to cause an individual to discipline themselves according to the behavioral expectations of the gazing subject, occurs in disciplinary institutions and it also manifests when the white gaze is internalized by blackness. The consequences of this surface in a plethora of dispositions and attitudes towards blackness that are internalized in the form of self-hate and other forms of cognitive dissonance.

Deconstructing which aspects of Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchal power dynamics produce these categorizations of blackness is necessary for the liberation of the empowered black subject. Accepting those oppressive situations as insurmountable enables them to be internalized and erases those inherent dimensions of black subjectivity that are necessary for a critical oppositional gaze to develop and challenge the white gaze. Navigating power by way of internalization is a tactic of survival, but this same tactic preserves oppression, it reproduces a way of life that is always subordinate to the white gaze, rather than challenging its legitimacy in social reality.

As Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy has developed, black people have been continually encouraged to internalize patriarchal heteronormative conceptions of being. We are subjected to these power dynamics, yet, because of our existential position, we are necessarily denied access to the privileges reserved for white people who are able to fit within prescribed identities which are normalized in society. The accessibility of these commodified dreams is controlled by IWSCP, which protects itself by distributing power and privilege among a white caste. Where patriarchal masculinity is portrayed as a route to respectability within IWSCP, white patriarchal men are already in possession of white supremacist patriarchal power in a way that is unattainable for black men.

Accepting prescribed patriarchal roles of masculinity and feelings of entitlement to occupy these roles means reproducing sexist power wherever we acknowledge gender. The white male gaze informs notions of desirability and it also models patriarchal power dynamics. This especially racialized dimension of patriarchy is a weapon used against black women, trans, queer, and non-binary people. Because of this reality, black men who have internalized Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist notions of gender must discard conceptions of success that perpetuate sexist power dynamics or patriarchal heteronormative representations of masculinity and femininity. In reclaiming our subjective experience of blackness, refuting the ways in which IWSCP sculpts our colonized perception of our selves is an inextricable part of radically re-imagining how we can operate in a decolonized world.

When we problematize our own liberation, we are exercising radical creativity because black subjectivity is not supported by the existing social reality. The means to affect and preserve systemic transformative change have not yet manifested in an accessible and tangible way that can fully decolonize blackness. Wherever the struggle for survival under this system demands concessions to the system, these decisions must at once be identified as such, rather than glorified or portrayed as an example of liberation. To breathe is a prerequisite for existence, and every obstacle to this fact for black people should be ruthlessly interrogated and opposed.

Where black people are able to claim the space outside of the white gaze by expressing their subjectivity, we see pride in black power actualized in our empathy—where we identify with each others struggles and our practices of liberation. We see safety and comfort and relief outside of the gaze. We find ourselves no longer fighting to prove our existence. We simply see each other as valid. Where community develops in this way, the power of the black oppositional gaze reveals itself as a tool for dismantling Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy.



# The Persistence of the Feminine:

Negative Dialectics and Feminist Thought  
Ariane McCullough

**ABSTRACT:** The women's liberation movement (WLM) can only produce its positive goal of autonomy if the woman question is not reduced to any principle or system of thought. This paper advances a feminist philosophy as a critique of civilization, understood as capitalist-patriarchy. The introductory section, entitled "Capitalist-Patriarchy and its Discontents", elaborates on the theory of capitalist-patriarchy (first developed by Maria Mies) and outlines modern philosophy, from the Enlightenment to Marxism to postmodernism, as its theoretical reflection. This critique of modernity follows from the contributions of Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt School, with his conception of 'negative dialectics' as dialectics without identity or system. "'Subjection' and 'Subjectivization'" responds with an alternative theory of the subject that escapes the impasse of the object-relation which characterizes patriarchy. The feminist subject is established without object-relation, but as a radically solitary embodiment of the real, borrowing from the contemporary theoretical work of Katerina Kolozova, Alain Badiou, and Francois Laruelle. "Feminist Theory and Practice" expands on the theory of the subject to explain the implications of the patriarchal object-relation in the concept of labor and in the separation of revolutionary theory and practice. The section furthermore discusses feminism as the invocation of "the feminine" as a virtual reality in which the subject appears without object, but as the instance of the real. The final section "The Body in Pain, Care of the Self" considers blackness as social death in relation to the feminist critique of capitalist-patriarchy. Black women occupy an especially vulnerable space in capitalist-patriarchy which is often taken for granted in the WLM. "The Body in Pain" advances a thesis that the critique of capitalist-patriarchy must be enacted with concern to the designation of black bodies as sentient but dead. This paper proposes to struggle with the persistence of the real against identity-thinking.

## I. Capitalist-Patriarchy and its Discontents

Modernity has seen the secularization of system, by which the real is subjected to a representation which claims to provide an explanation of the world. I call system any such a representation or form. Truth is deferred to system, which consumes the real for its own authority and abstracts from it only that which can be recognized by thought. In other words, system postulates itself as authoritative by casting out what is transcendent to thought. Any discourse of truth is therefore contingent to the unity of system. In modern philosophy, truth judgment is carried out by a knowing subject, who is the transcendental function for truth. In Kant, this transcendental subject is abstracted from the empirical self, who is situated in a social-historical context. With regard to practical reason, however, the empirical self, i.e. the social-historical individual, must always act as transcendental.

Since system appears as knowledge of the real, the individual must take up his own maxim of action as an unconditional Good, and cast out the authority of the other as transcendent to thought. Here discourses of truth are only made global inasmuch as the identity of system can be imposed on the real and preserved as a reality in its own right. This necessarily entails violence against the real, which cannot ultimately be subjected to representation. The modern secularization of system can be denoted as identity-thought, thinking the real according to identity or representation.

In reflecting a qualitative change in human object-relation to nature, modernization in Western philosophy can be understood as a theory of the process of Western civilization, even if it has not been conscious of itself as such. The Enlightenment develops a loosely unified theory of civilization that is true to its

historical context, despite the characteristic secularization of system and its removal from the historical situation. In substance, modern philosophy advances a theory of civilization as capitalist-patriarchy.<sup>1</sup> Capitalist-patriarchy denotes the historical and societal dimension of women's exploitation expressed in its contemporary manifestation, among capitalist relations of production. This hypothesis of modern philosophy as reflecting capitalist-patriarchy aims at its theories of subject, which on the one hand, are in continuity with the appropriation of women and their bodies as belonging to 'nature' and which on the other, propose equality of rights and privileges among men, conditioned by the relations of private property. As prolific critics of private property, Marx and Engels developed historical materialism in response to not only the materialism of Feuerbach but also to the movement of German idealism that – represented foremost by Kant, Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling – brought modern philosophy to its culmination. As a critique of modernity at the level of contemporary relations of production, that is, as a critique of private property, historical materialism and the orthodox Marxist tradition lack consciousness of themselves as ideologically continuous with the function of patriarchy. The women's liberation movement (WLM) stands to advance feminism as a fundamental critique of civilization only if the 'woman question' is not confined to already existing theoretical frameworks as Marxism or liberalism, that is, if feminism approaches the 'woman question' in such a way that it "fundamentally criticizes all these theories and begs for a new theory of society altogether."<sup>2</sup> The postmodern tendency to express truth as contingent on the power to impose it only confirms an ideological continuity with capitalist-patriarchy and thus fails in its pretense as a critique of modern philosophy. By collapsing truth to the power of system, postmodernism confines the subject to the question of whether it is unitary or non-unitary in relation to the objective world. The possibility of the subject to act upon object with authority is not simply challenged, but annulled by the concept of the subject as the agent of system. The concept of resistance and autonomy is met with skepticism in light of this non-unitary theory of the subject, since without unity against the object, a subject could not possibly resist as such.

The existence of the WLM provokes people because one always already consciously belongs to the context of its struggle, i.e. sexual difference. The struggle of the WLM takes place within women and men and between women and men such that "every person is forced, sooner or later, to take sides."<sup>3</sup> The task of feminism in its attack on capitalist-patriarchy is to advance a form of thinking that demonstrates authority without the violence of system, but by correlation with the real that system encounters in its historical situation.<sup>4</sup> Civilization is the process by which the identity of woman has been marked by conjoining the opposing concepts of nature and humanity, so that women are conceived as participating in social production and activity without being productive or active. Women are then necessarily cast into the realm of nature, to be appropriated and set into motion by humans to produce their own means of subsistence. The uncompensated appropriation of women's activity for the life of humanity, that is, the "naturalization" of women's work, comes into contradiction to the premise that women, as humans themselves, are implicated in the production and reproduction of life.

Womanhood, even in historical materialism, must be defined by exploitation, in that the mode of production is necessarily sustained by women at the

1 Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 38.

2 *Ibid.*, 12

3 *Ibid.*, 6

4 Theodor W. Adorno, "Lecture 4: Whether Philosophy is Possible without System," in *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 39.

expense of women. The transcendental subject who ordains the unity of the object is rightly denoted as Man, as that Subject is defined by the dominating and instrumental object-relation of men to nature and women. As Mies notes, "women are already defined as part of the physical conditions of (male) production."<sup>5</sup> In view of the dialectic of civilization, feminist philosophy makes use of a negative dialectic as critical and self-critical consciousness that shifts in the ideological elements of capitalist-patriarchy release the power contained within those elements. The structure of such a critical mode of thought is guided by the coercion that the real exercises over thought and reveals the real as transcendent and radically anterior to thought.

The unity of feminist thought is determined by the negation of identity-thought, or system, by the real. The negative dialectic that feminism suggests calls into question the sexed identity of social individuals without annulling sexed identity. To be sure, the fiction of sex—for instance, the myth of woman as 'non-producer'—is the reality of sex for social individuals, which is to say, the category of sex is *real*, but the truth of its asymmetry does not derive legitimacy from the realm of thought (e.g. from biologicistic explanation or the charge of "male chauvinism") but from "the unique, lived reality of the subject."<sup>6</sup> The reality of womanhood then is not simply an issue of male chauvinism nor of ideological relations, or biological differences, but is ultimately of historical exploitation by men. Our task in critiquing civilization, i.e. capitalist-patriarchy, is to attempt to engage in a process of truth-production from the lived reality of the subject, thereby escaping the patriarchal impasse of auto-legitimization.

The section that follows outlines an alternative theory of subject for this process, which constitutes feminist philosophy as a non-standard style of thought.

## II. 'Subjection' and 'Subjectivization'

The transcendental subject, i.e. 'Man', maintains the dialectic of civilization against the persistence of the real through violence and the concealment thereof. All state apparatuses, which function by a duality of repression and ideology, contribute to the reproduction of the relations of production and belong to the transcendental subject—the Subject of history and morality—who ordains the order of things. The political tradition of Enlightenment, i.e. liberalism, grants a humanism which establishes the bourgeois as the Subject and goal of history. Liberalism presents the classical banner of Equality, Liberty, and Fraternity such that equality is possible for the land-owning (bourgeois) class of men, at the cost of other "free" men who must sell their labor-power to the bourgeois, and the women who were tortured, killed, and robbed during the European witch-hunt, and later secured as sources of free labor. The modern process of so-called primitive accumulation of capital also involved, of course, the mass transformation of African humans into capital, called the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, along with the violent depopulation and appropriation of the "New World" for its land and resources, which is to say, the conquest and genocide of indigenous Americans. Civilization or "development", as goes the contemporary term, is the synthetic notion of a polarized process in which the "progress" of one pole (the "First World", the centers, the metropolis), in its accumulation of capital and expansion of productive forces, is correlated to the exploitation and oppression of an opposite pole (the Third World, the peripheries, the colonies). Contrary to the dominant neoliberal notion of globalization as the process of expanding wealth and bourgeois right to "developing" coun-

<sup>5</sup> Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation*, 57.

<sup>6</sup> Katerina Kolozova, *Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 132.

tries, globalized monopoly capitalism has only extended and accelerated processes of proletarianization, as today all or almost all workers sell their labor-power, even cognitive if necessary, and produce commodities. The bourgeois notion of Man as the Subject and goal of history is liquidated by the actual course of capital accumulation, which disorganizes and dissolves the social fabric. All that is holy is profaned, all that is solid melts into air—and the middle classes in the First World are uprooted from the stability of their assets: women, children, property, and social and political dominance. Fascism appears as the last resort to defend Man and his civilization from the real disaster of capital accumulation, which has always otherwise been confined to the underdeveloped peripheries of the world-system.

The dialectic of Enlightenment constitutes the Subject by a process of subjection that is always subjection of the other. Enlightenment society ultimately dreams to "grow whilst remaining identical to what it was, to touch the other without vulnerability."<sup>7</sup> The Subject imposes its own truth on the real by force, repressing the other who constitutes the basis of desire. Enlightenment is fundamentally driven by a castration anxiety in the Lacanian sense: the Subject fears the loss of unity before the lack in the other, avoids the fact that he himself also bears this lack, and therefore never realizes that the other is also a subject nor that his or her desire is constituted as the desire of the other. Castration completes the symbolic break, which frees the base drive-energy (*jouissance*) of the subject from its auto-erotic or maternal enclosure. In turn, the subject compromises with the social circulation of demand to satisfy its own needs. Demand is de-centered so that the subject becomes a social individual, turned to produce his or her own means of subsistence. The transcendental Subject, however, disavows the symbolic break in castration and exists on par with the course of capitalist production, where demand dominates in the endless self-valorization of capital (M-C-M'). Commodity fetishism is a fetishism insofar as instead of posing the lack as the master-signifier and possibility of any signified, an object linked to the drives acts as a symbolic thesis. Living labor, which is to say, drive-energy, is shifted onto the objects of labor as commodities. The commodity becomes the substitute for a sign, which is otherwise meant to be the closure of signifier and signified. Value independently asserts its identity with itself in the money-form, and the drive-energy invested by the subject returns in surplus-value produced without regard to need. The bourgeois Subject competes with the capitalist law of value as "Origin, Essence, and Cause, responsible in its internality for all the determinations of the external "Object".<sup>8</sup> The Marxist philosophy of historical and dialectical materialism rejects the transcendental category of the Subject as Origin of history, instead advancing the thesis of history as a "process without a Subject or Goal(s)." In the dialectical-materialist conception of history, "abstract economic reality" is fundamentally effectuated by the more concrete reality of "the mode of production of a determinate social formation", that is, the degree of development of the forces of production and the state of the relations of production.<sup>9</sup> The essence of any social formation is constituted by the interplay of the economic structure and the superstructure of the State and legal, political, and ideological forms. Social reality is determined in the last instance by the (economic) mode of production along with the relative autonomy and specific efficacy of superstructure forms. Althusser distills from Marx and Engels the concept of overdetermined contradiction as the "accumulation of effective determinations (deriving from the superstructures and from special national and international circum-

7 Nick Land, "Kant, Capital, and the Prohibition of Incest," in *Fanged Noumena*, ed. Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier (New York: Sequence Press, 2011), 63-4.

8 Louis Althusser, "Reply to John Lewis," in *Essays in Self-Criticism* (London: NLB, 1976), 96.

9 Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," in *For Marx* (New York: Verso, 2005), 110.



stances) on the determination in the last instance by the economic.”<sup>10</sup> Against German idealism, Feuerbachian materialism, and quasi-Marxist phenomenological humanism, the form of the subject is necessarily imposed on the agent-individual for the relations of production to function. Humans, i.e. social individuals, are only subjects active in social-historical practice through the determination of the relations of production and reproduction (labor process, the division of labor, class struggle, etc.), and in their forms.

The concept of determination-in-the-last-instance (DLI) first appears in dialectical materialist philosophy in this way, that history is determined in the last instance by the production and reproduction of life. The DLI is here a causality immanent to the dialectic of civilization, whereby the historical event emerges unconsciously as the result of the overdetermined contradiction among superstructure forms and the economic basis of the situation. The truth of the subject is completely subsumed by the course of history and its determination by the reciprocity of the mode of production and the superstructure. A dialectical method without system redefines the DLI as the causality of the real, exerted upon thought and its objects, upon system given as the experience-form of the world. The real is radical immanence (to) itself and the DLI is distinguished from reciprocal determination along these lines:

(1) Instead of dividing causality between two terms (cause and effect) in an ontological couple, it is attributed to one of these alone: the effect then supposes a passive object, a simply occasional "receptacle" of this causality.

(2) This occasion is already reduced to the moment of its own manifestation and thus deprived of determining or real action in return. The DLI supposes a unilateral, not reciprocal, duality of causes.

(3) The causality of the DLI moves in one direction, from the real toward the efficacy of world- thought, rather in the two opposing yet convergent directions of the dialectic.

(4) Cause is not identified apart from its effect along with a supposed given other term but—as a universal negative category—supposes a functional transcendental instance through which the real can be said to act.<sup>11</sup>

I call subject this very instance, that is, the means through which the real can enact causality without being alienated in its material of action. The subject is not transcendental like the real but is the finite point woven out of the real and through which, in its infinite being, the real passes. A feminist critique of the subject is based on a Lacanian notion that truth or the real (the “true-real” [vréal] as Kristeva says<sup>12</sup>) is “not a qualification of knowledge nor an intuition of the intelligible.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, the radicalism of the rebellion against capitalist-patriarchy stands for a fidelity of the singularity of thought correlating with the singularity of the true-real, wherein the subject is the advent of this fidelity. The process of a truth begins when a name has arisen from the real, i.e. the void that sutures every situation to being, by which it has been decided that an event has supplemented the situation. In substance, the process is the evaluation, by means of an operator of fidelity, of the degree of connection between the terms of the situation and the transcendental name of the event. The terms of the situation positively connected to the name of the event form an infinite part of the situation such that it is suspended on a future and thus never pre-

10 Ibid., 113

11 Francois Laruelle, “Determination-in-the-last-instance (DLI),” in *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy* (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal Publishing, 2013), 50-1.

12 Julia Kristeva, “The True-Real,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 214-37.

13 Alain Badiou, “On a Finally Objectless Subject,” in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, ed. Eduardo Cadava, et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1991), 25.

sented. If this infinite part will have avoided coinciding with what is discernible for knowledge, the post-eventual procedure produces a truth (absolutely indistinguishable or generic), a “metonymy of the situation’s very being, i.e. of the pure or unnamed multiple into which this being is resolved.”<sup>14</sup> As the local or finite configuration of a truth, the subject is neither the intervention of the name nor the fidelity operator, but rather the form by which the event is incorporated into the situation, as subjectivization is the emergence of the fidelity operator after the naming that decides the event. To reiterate, the material of the subject is the truth of the situation, which is to say, the terms of the situation positively evaluated by the fidelity operator. The evaluation is random in the sense that nothing in the name of the event or the operator ordains that a term be evaluated at a particular time and place, so the material of the subject must be this randomness. Consequently, the subject can be qualified, though singular, as it is comprised of an event name and a fidelity operator. With regard to the multiple being of terms evaluated, however, the subject cannot be qualified since its material is arbitrary. The subject is thus separated from knowledge by randomness, and the elimination of that randomness is accomplished only as truth, insofar as a truth is produced as the generic and indiscernible part of a situation. The subject is only the instance of the true-real in the world, which is to say, the true-real transcends every subject. The subject relates to truth in a belief that there is a truth. The belief itself takes the form of knowledge and figures as a yet-to-come that goes by the name of truth. The event alone holds out the promise of belief, which is “sustained by the fact that with the resources of the situation—its multiples and its language—a subject generates names whose referents are in the future anterior”<sup>15</sup> The names generated by a subject are suspended upon the yet-to-come of a truth, and function to approximate a situation that will have come in which the generic will have finally been presented as a truth of the actual situation. To demonstrate this simply, we must note that the generic procedure points to the subject as a singular instance of a truth. One who has not been drawn forth to a connection with the event generally does not recognize the names a subject generates as having any content. Religious belief in God, for example, is cast aside by a non-believer as worship of an empty name. When one falls in love, the experience of the loved one becomes radically different and, to external observers, unrealistic. In this way, the location of every subject is determined by an emergence of a situational language whose multiple referents are conditioned by the future-perfect of the generic.

In its struggle against the generic indiscernibility of truth, a subject is at once the real of the generic procedure and the hypothesis of the yet-to-come. Only through the subject can the true-real enact a causality without becoming alienated in the material of its action. The subject makes a hypothesis about “itself” in the testimony of the name; the subject will have come with the yet-to-come of the truth and is, therefore, the truth in person. By this new conception, one cannot think a true thought unless he or she wills that truth to happen. This thought is animated by a desire to exit the radical solitude in the real and reach out to the other as the instance of redemption. To present a truth to the other means deliverance from the fragmentary world of thought unto the radical unity of the real.

To this extent, love appears as the compulsory mode of resistance of the real to any system. The feminist subject is oriented toward love by the fact that he or she stands as the advent of resistance, that is, correlation of thought with the real. A feminist mode of thought denotes the condition of a genuine universalism, a demand for unconditional equality between all human beings regard-

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 31

less of their biological condition but also their bodily and physical state—including whether they are living or dead. A guiding principle of critique of capitalist-patriarchy has to be the rejection and abolition of asymmetrical divisions based on exploitation, such that compassion can be established with the other in their otherness, in their radical solitude in the real. In the next section, I intend to further elaborate some basic principles and concepts for a feminist perspective with regard to how women figure in the contemporary world-system. Understanding the positive goal of the WLM as autonomy, i.e. freedom from coercion over our bodies and lives, we must further sketch out the importance of body politics in the broad context of capitalist patriarchy.

### III. Feminist Theory and Praxis

If philosophy is concerned with the real, theoretical work cannot be understood as pure contemplation of the real, because any act of thought about the real is always a practical act. Every synthetic judgment brings about change and as such, should be understood as work. An understanding of theory (*theoria*, *θεωρία*) as contemplation entails the non-synthetic knot of the idealist dialectic, where the real is a lack whose existence is suspected and desired but never reached. In this signifying system, living labor is closed within theory, condemning theory to meaning, “disarticulating it, only to return to it, disenchanted.”<sup>16</sup> The negative is sublimated by the social organism and set in a caste apart from the state-sanctioned hierarchy, for example, as the “intellectual” types of the artist, performer, or public intellectual. These contemplatives exist outside of practice and exchange, as a symbolic surplus. The task of philosophy, after supposing itself without system and concerning itself with the real, is to dismantle the rigidity of the separation of theory and practice. For thought to be practical, it must not be restricted in advance by the practice to which it is directly applied. This phenomenon of restriction has manifested among historical Marxist traditions that, in following an inadequate concept of labor, reserved their definition of the proletariat to only one of its segments. Orthodoxy (*orthodoxia* – “right opinion”), in Marxism as in the Christian tradition, designates a division of truth into the truth and its meaning, aiming to conceal the truth while also claiming that it can be revealed to meaning. Dialectical materialism denotes social practice as the only criterion of truth,<sup>17</sup> but the judgment of truth is already reflection or contemplation of practice, and not practice in itself. By contrast, heresy allows for the consciousness of the non-identity of truth without expressing it directly. The heretical fidelity to the lived defines the signifying practice of the text, which intersects with the Lacanian category of analytic discourse. This fidelity is “radical in its non-radicalism, in refraining from any reduction to a principle, in its accentuation of the partial against the total, in its fragmentary character.”<sup>18</sup> Moving away from the transference discourse of orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis, Lacan calls into question the formulation of “the subject supposed to know”<sup>19</sup>, a form marked by the patriarchal object-relation to nature.

16 Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 96.

17 Mao Tse-Tung, “On Practice,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. 1 (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1960), 297.

18 Adorno, “The Essay as Form,” in *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 9.

19 Jacques Lacan, “God and the Jouissance of the Woman,” in *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 139.

Contemplation maintains this formulation, giving primacy to the master-signifier over the desiring subject (divided between need and demand) and to knowledge over the object of desire. In consequence, subjectivity retreats under a “will to truth” carried out through the register of meaning. The will to truth moves from one signifier to another, never reaching the real for the lost object of desire. The real that is always already given unto us is not the same as what exists of it in terms of language. On the contrary, without the “knowledge” of the real by language, it is always in excess of meaning, language, and pleasure.

The real, that is, nature, has historically been apprehended in terms of pleasure. In the sense that humans sustain themselves by making use of what is available, i.e. given to them, everything that works to the goodwill of human subsistence is designated by pleasure. The interpretation of nature first entails humans’ appropriation of their own bodies, both as the primary ‘tool’ by which they act upon nature and as the aim of the satisfaction of needs. The organic differences between bodies are differently interpreted and valued, according to the mode of production. Throughout the course of history, men and women have developed qualitatively different relationships to their own bodily nature, which have, in turn, developed qualitatively different forms of the appropriation of external nature.<sup>20</sup> Patriarchal civilization is grown out of a coercive sexual division of labor whereby female productivity has been mystified as the precondition of all productivity. World-historical development has advanced production through means of violence and coercion, wherein tools and weapons have been fashioned to kill and manipulate animals and humans for breeding and territory. Such means of coercion would eventually assist the pillage, raiding, and robbery of other economies for their productive forces, which necessarily included women. Exploitation is understood then as not only the one-sided appropriation of a community surplus of resources but also the expropriation of the necessary resources of other communities. The exploitation of women appears throughout patriarchal civilization such that subsistence production, or the general production of life, has been performed through the devalued labor of women and constituted the basis upon which any particular relations of production can be sustained and reproduced. To clarify, I understand the labor of women historically, as based upon the fact that women who give birth to children and suckle them must provide food for themselves and for the children, leading to the tradition of gathering. At the development of pastoral economies, women became more confined to their fertility and along these lines, became subject to a system of exchange in which they were kidnapped and trafficked for currency, for slave labor, or to produce slaves. Under the conditions of European feudalism, women’s bodies continued to be considered to belong to nature. As such, during the first era of European colonial campaigns, which pauperized the peasants in Western Europe and caused mass migration into cities, women were violently subordinated on a large scale in the witch-hunt, which served to eliminate female competition in the merchant class, destroy autonomy over reproduction, and accumulate capital for the growing bourgeoisie. The establishment of private property and the capitalist relations of production initially domesticated bourgeois women to be tied to the nuclear family as a unit for the accumulation of capital. The establishment of the nuclear family model among both the owning classes and the working classes became strategic for

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<sup>20</sup> Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation*, 53.

the maintenance of accumulation. Not only did the family function as a production unit, but the family became an ideological site to which the working class attached itself. Mainstream labor movements have historically concerned themselves not with patriarchal-capitalist relations of production, but with the conditions for supporting a family with a housewife and children. Interests of the family come into conflict with the interests of the (working) class, undermining the integrity of class struggle.<sup>21</sup> In the era of globalized monopoly capitalism, the international division of labor has further divided the role of the housewife, as women in the metropolis are made to be consumers of products manufactured by women in the colonies.<sup>22</sup> This is the contemporary social definition of woman as a housewife, that she continues to figure as a subsistence producer despite effectively being a commodity producer.

For patriarchal thinking, everything which contributes to the subsistence or pleasure of the social individual is declared Good. This is the Freudian pleasure principle, wherein the object of desire is united with the social place of the "I". The setup of the pleasure principle closely associates with the patriarchal object-relation that has been supposed in philosophy by system, which shares in the inscription of fantasy in the sexual tie; we have no doubt seen this in the simple plenitude of analogies of penis and plow, seed and semen, field and women, and so forth. In this phallic function, man is situated as free to give up his own *jouissance* in place of what is lost in castration, to find another object in which he invests his drive-energy to sustain his imaginary unity. Woman, however, is constituted without this autonomy, appearing as "not all", never having gone through the amputation of castration. In essence, the man sees in his partner what can serve as his own support. The male gaze is, therefore, narcissistic. Romantic love and love marriage appear as primary ideological developments of capitalist-patriarchy, in that the man figures woman as the object of desire in his fantasy, but without the primacy of the sexual relation. The modern Western domestication of woman consists of her continued constitution in the family to serve the interests of men, from the father to the husband to the son, and of a coincident morality of sexual conduct developed in the Victorian era. Foucault<sup>23</sup> chronicles the history of this morality whereby bourgeois society breaks with the tradition of the *ars erotica* ["erotic art"] and equips itself with a *scientia sexualis* ["science of sexuality"], which operates as a project in producing knowledge of sex as a specific field of truth.<sup>24</sup> Perversions are invented and incorporated into this new context, sexual perverts representing in themselves a certain truth about sexual conduct, namely its base amorality. Patriarchal object-relation reveals itself here, in that the morality of sexual conduct is already implied in everything said about the Good, from Aristotle to Kant to Freud. The fact of morality is that love, as the solidarity of subjects in their radical solitude, is impossible and the sexual relation collapses into non-sense, not that that should diminish the power of the fantasy.<sup>25</sup> Supposing love as the objectification of woman-subject, the phallic function designates the *jouissance* of woman as supplementary. Which is to say, feminine *jouissance* is by no means ac-

21 See Alexandra Kollontai, "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle."

22 Mies, "Colonization and Housewifization," in *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 74-100.

23 See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

24 *Ibid.*, 67

25 Lacan, "A Love Letter," in *Feminine Sexuality*, 158.

counted for in the Good, civilization does well without it. Whereas contemplation simulates *jouissance* in the realm of thought, text-practice brings to bear that the act of thought is *jouissance*, always already radically solitary in its pretension to produce a universe. The soul (psyche, ψυχή) is the effect of the real's mediation in language, inscribed on the real body, such that as long as soul wants for itself, sex does not count. There is only the subject, the instance of the real in language, always caught within the signifying process by which meaning is generated. One might therefore designate the real as "the body without embodiment", or even as the flesh. Any transcendence of and rebellion against capitalist-patriarchal relations necessarily takes place through embodiment. The body is the only possible locus of resistance, inasmuch as we understand resistance as real. The text reveals the *jouissance* of the body as the *raison d'être* of the signifying process. Because the signifying process lies beyond the sphere of material production (the sphere of practice, as Mao would say), it transforms the social individual into a subject in process, whose basis is asocial. By this very fact, however, the practice of the text reveals the possibility of bringing about new social relations.<sup>26</sup> The identity of the dialectic is relinquished into rhythm, and radical subjectivity is engendered by dialectics without system.

The feminist subject invokes the feminine as a name suspended upon the yet-to-come of truth. As Lacan suggests, the WLM takes on a different substance in advancing the *jouissance* of the body as a *jouissance* beyond the phallus.<sup>27</sup> The feminine transcends the phallic-patriarchal designation of woman as "not all" by taking it in its stride. If at present we cannot speak of *the* woman because her essence is not all, we can speak of *the* woman as not yet existing. This is the hypothesis of the feminist subject: that *the* woman does not exist, but there is no reason that this should remain so. *The* woman does not exist as self-consciousness in itself and for itself, as Hegel would say. In the phallic function, woman exists as the incarnation of the object of desire and not-herself. For us, the feminine is the existence of *the* woman, supposed as eternally eventual. The coming of the woman is really possible, but always contingent, and cannot be subjected to control or probability. If the possibility of feminine *jouissance* can have an effect upon present existence, it can do so only in the case of a subject moved by the desire for that *jouissance*, the *jouissance* of the body. This orientation affirms a doublet of the real and the lived, or of "the body without embodiment" and the embodied subject. The affirmation of both the real pain of primal estrangement and the real belonging in the embodied instance radicalizes Hegelian or Kantian self-consciousness. Woman becomes an in self and for self through love, "[a]n in self and a for self that always also remain for the other and in a world and a universe that are partway open."<sup>28</sup> Self-realization ultimately comes about in conjunction with the realization of the other as other. The development of a feminist concept of labor must begin here, in rejecting Marx's distinction between the realm of freedom and the realm of necessity.<sup>29</sup> Freedom cannot be understood as conditioned by the production of life, but for our purposes, coincident with it. For us, the feminist con-

26 Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 105.

27 Lacan, "God and the Jouissance of The Woman," 145.

28 Luce Irigaray, "Love of the Other," in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 149.

29 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3 (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 959.



ception of labor has to feature five central elements: (1) a core concept of the production of immediate life, that is, the production of life as the goal of work; (2) a different concept of time, "in which times of work and times of rest and enjoyment are alternating and interspersed"; (3) a "maintenance of work as a direct and sensual interaction with nature, with organic matter and living organisms"; (4) a maintenance of a useful and necessary sense of work; and (5) an abolition of the wide division between production and consumption.<sup>30</sup> The constellation of these elements outlines feminist thinking beyond the distinction of theory and practice. Feminism is a conceptual framework for the procedure of the transcendence of capitalist-patriarchy. Alternately, feminism is a stratagem or posture by which thought is introduced to the feminine, which is to say, the subject as such, without object. The identity of this subject is (the) real, lived as radical solitude. The affirmation of radical solitude, of suffering at the hands of the world, requires thinking a future becoming in which emancipation from the body is not possible. The subject transforms his or her incapacity to live and to act into an orientation toward a love of life beyond horror, pain, and suffering, even in a world of horror, pain, and suffering. The negativity of betrayal and violence is reinforced and embraced in its proper part along with the positivity of friendship and comfort. The feminist conception of hope functions as a kind of memory that is not temporal, but radical: a remembrance of the unity of the real and a devotion to its worldly instance. In this final section, I will briefly discuss the indispensable advances and contributions of black women in realizing feminist thought, with regard to the specificity of the black female subject-position. The exploitation and alienation of black women among the WLM stands in opposition to the development of feminism as a critique of capitalist-patriarchy down to its foundation, as such alienation is continuous with the slave relation which constitutes capitalism.

#### **IV. The Body in Pain, Care of the Self**

In the last two decades or so, the notion of precarity has become a central problematic in postmodern theory for the critique of capitalism, especially in the loosely associated Italian-originated field of autonomist Marxism. Michael Hardt and Toni Negri appear as prime figures in this tendency, well-known for their trilogy of *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009). As Marxists, they begin with the premise that capital tends toward a fundamental indifference to life, as the configuration of the commodity of labor-power always already constitutes a deadening of living labor through the structure of employment. This is what Marx means by the alienation of labor, that the wage-laborer is diverted to activity outside of his or her own immediate interest and labor comes to serve private property rather than the ends of human life. Under capitalist relations, labor is the servant of the wage. The increase of productivity concurs with a greater pressure to increase the wage. At this point, the worker appears more precarious in his or her condition of existence. For autonomists, precarity appears as a strategy of capital to capture the social "multitude," the body of social individuals without class and without allegiance to political governance. This supposed capture is that of labor-power. Precarity and unemployment are strategic to maintaining the service of labor to private property. No doubt, the precarity of the worker undermines the strength of labor struggle, as workers are more willing to compete in maintaining their wage than to take ac-

<sup>30</sup> Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation*, 216-9.

tion against the relations of production. However, the accumulation of capital has manifested on the conditions of a more fundamental strategy of “ontological” capture, that is, the capture of living labor itself, in the enslavement of black peoples. The autonomist/Spinozist allusion to the “multitude” as a collective political form with the potential to create and subvert capital is highly deceptive in the era of globalized monopoly capitalism, in which proletarianization has become increasingly generalized by capital, whether “formally” in the example of peripheral peasants or “really” in the example of metropolitan cognitive labor. Not only that, but the experience of generalized proletarianization as extreme precarity

—a phenomenon that Cornel West describes as “niggerization”<sup>31</sup>—resembles only the moment before the ontological capture and social death of blacks. The black subject-position, since slavery, is a position of accumulation and convertibility that places ‘sentient but dead’ objects in deprivation of relationality. The problematic of precarity and the call to an existential commons already suggests the prior closure of living labor onto itself, excluding the slave, whose labor is never his or her own. In view of this, we advance the Afropessimist thesis that progressive political projects are formulated on a conception of community that is a priori anti-black, in the sense that human community and civil society, as much as they can assert the autonomy of living labor, are apparatuses of governance, for the normalization of (black) pain and suffering. The WLM, for example, has presented itself time and time again as parasitic on the work and energy of black women, especially in the recent popularization and dilution of intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw<sup>32</sup> from a struggle concept of black women and women of color, who, for their own survival, have had to fight on multiple fronts.

Even in the broad WLM, the black female body is configured as a passage for humanity into the non-human. One does not have to go far to see how the concurrent hyper-sexualization and de-sexualization of black women suggests her formulation as both an incarnate object of desire and object of sadism and violence. As an axiom, I suppose that black women occupy a position of special vulnerability that effectuates the tradition of pluralism found among them, as seen in such prolific theorists as Crenshaw, Alice Walker, Patricia Hill Collins, and bell hooks. As women, we are designated as not all; as blacks, that is, as racialized subjects, we are designated as not at all, excluded by ontology. Whereas Lacan denotes “a jouissance proper to [woman] and of which she herself does not know, except that she experiences it,” black woman cannot even be said to experience it. The event of ontological capture is the absolute loss of jouissance—i.e. the appropriation of living labor as such— and that event of loss cannot be named. Black women are required to respond to the symbolic ontological violence of racialization and patriarchal objectification with an incommensurate symbolic violence which asserts social reciprocity and makes operative a vulnerability to the other. The invocation of the feminine has to be a decolonization of being. A feminist philosophy takes up the task of speculation without system because the yet-to-come unites within itself the absolute core of ontology and the universal aspirations of ethics. I would not, therefore, suppose a hierarchy of importance to ‘the black question’, ‘the woman question’, or ‘the proletarian question’, because the condition and point of confronting women’s liberation—capitalist-patriarchy—already involves the

31 See “Attica Is All of Us: Cornel West on the 40th Anniversary of the Attica Prison Rebellion,” [democracynow.org](http://democracynow.org), last modified September 12, 2011, [https://www.democracynow.org/2011/9/12/attica\\_is\\_all\\_of\\_us\\_cornel/](https://www.democracynow.org/2011/9/12/attica_is_all_of_us_cornel/).

32 See Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” in *The Public Nature of Private Violence*, ed. Martha Albertson Fineman and Rixanne Mykitiuk (New York: Routledge, 1994).



issue of the capitalist relations of production, which already maintain their integrity through black social death. The WLM necessarily provokes human beings, i.e. social individuals, in their sexed identity, but it must also provoke human beings in their being-human, which is not granted to black bodies. Such an orientation manifests, for example, in how one thinks police brutality and mass incarceration. Anti-black violence is not contingent but constitutive to the fabric of civilization. Capitalist-patriarchy designates black bodies as objects without relation. The constitution of the black body as capital cannot be undone, as black positionality is constantly reenacted in the accumulation of capital. In my view,

#BlackLivesMatter enacts symbolic decolonial violence through a simple axiom that dissolves the distinction between theory and practice. The movement is the declaration that black lives matter, its participant subjects are moved by a desire to make the declaration true. We must consider how the feminist subject can be moved by the desire towards a *jouissance* of the black body. In the first place, a temporal primacy of the “I” is not available to the black subject, only the radical primacy of the “I” as the instance of the real. The event horizon of the black’s fragmentation is not a narrative moment of physical violence or social estrangement, but the subjection of the real flesh to an anatomy (*ana-tomia* – “cutting up”). To evoke the *jouissance* of the body, rather than its perfection, we must reject an orthodox discourse of “cure.” Healing justice has emerged among women of color as “a framework that identifies how we can holistically respond to and intervene [in] generational trauma and violence and to bring collective practices that can impact and transform the consequences of oppression on our bodies, hearts, and minds.”<sup>33</sup> The framework has been defined for the practice-process of healing inside liberation, to re-center the production of life as the aim of work and politics. We agree to the classic feminist adage that the personal is political, but as subject, we are moved by a desire of life to accomplish itself elsewhere than politics. In our world, however, this desire for emancipation takes on a necessarily political form. Healing justice is paradigmatic for feminist philosophy as a critique of capitalist-patriarchy because of its radical affirmation of vulnerability. The subject, the holistic self, is contemplated through the courage and patience with which the embodied and solitary real faces the world. The subject is produced out of the affirmation of the pain of radical solitude, whether it is that of the “I” or of the other. This is the feminist challenge to capitalist-patriarchy and its philosophical traditions, that a subject of love cannot have an object.

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# Revolution, Desire, and Eternal Return in Revolutionary Letters

Iris Bloomfield

## I. Introduction

In Diane di Prima's *Revolutionary Letters*, desire is considered the creative engine of historical dialectic. Desire is also asemantic, collective, and anarchic, and so the speaker knows that in trying to express desire within language, she is taking an incredible risk—a risk that may negate herself, resulting in social and/or physical death, but also might, in affirming chance, unite being and becoming in a single dicethrow. In this work, di Prima also puts desire in dialectic with love, which she considers the most minimally mediated expression of desire. Love, in *Revolutionary Letters*, is analogous with the gift, something which is freely given. Within capitalism, there is no such thing as a gift; or if something is a gift, it is considered to be outside the semantic field of capital. In other words, capitalism considers the commodity the gift, since, in obscuring the social relations that produced the commodity, and in obscuring the commodity's history, it is endowed with an aura of "givenness." Arguing against the natural givenness of the commodity and the commodity relation, di Prima argues that the gift is not something transcendental, but rather it is immanent to the social, and under capitalism practically nonexistent; in the rigid social relations of capitalism, love fails to materialize. In addition, di Prima develops an interesting monism that links matter and spirit as two different modalities of expression for one universal substance—desire. Di Prima's monism is what enables her to link the semantic field of her poetry with capitalist economy and socially mediated existence. From this point she is able to postulate utopia as a bringing into alignment of material economy with libidinal economy, as an economy of the gift, that is a univocal becoming. The problem for di Prima is not speech itself, but definite, rigid social relations that limits the possibilities for the social organization of desire and routes them towards ecological destruction rather than a genuine economy of the gift. Just as desire is negatively expressed in the social, so is utopia. Similar to utopia, desire is endlessly deferred, expressed in an endless becoming, a destination never actually arrived at but always on the horizon. Thus, another thing I will argue, is that revolutionary desire, for di Prima, is always desire for utopia. For di Prima, this means that revolutionary struggle is not a means towards an end, but an endless means, a dicethrow, a univocal becoming affirmed in the economy of the gift. This finally allows di Prima to make one final statement by the end of *Revolutionary Letters*: that affirmation in the eternal return of the gift means that society inevitably (albeit asymptotically) approaches universal love in history. At this point it will become clear that poetry is the ideal form for di Prima because it is where a minimally mediated relationship between the semantic and asemantic occurs: poetry is the most useful tool of utopic imagination.

## II. Di Prima's Metaphysics of the Semantic Field

In "Revolutionary Letter #1," di Prima equates desire with the asemantic, collective, and anarchic. In addition, she equates Self with spirit, which though "it has no other," is "measured out, in bits, spread over / the roulette table" (di Prima, 1). Here the soul, despite its desire for freedom from symbolic tyranny, is inescapably quantified and translated in terms of capital, by sole virtue of having a body, "this flesh all I have to offer, to make the play with" (di Prima, 1). Despite this, the speaker recognizes the necessity of making the play—though it is not itself what she desires. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Gilles Deleuze writes, "The dice which are thrown once are the affirmation of chance, the combination which they form on falling is the affirmation of necessity. Necessity is affirmed of chance in exactly the sense that being is affirmed of becoming and unity is affirmed of multiplicity" (Deleuze, 26). What does the speaker desire, though? Not a cash prize it seems, nor her own death, but company in nonstop mobility and endless evasion from capture in the semantic field,

my move

as we slither across this go board, stepping always

(we hope) between the lines (di Prima, 7).

This is further evidenced in the absence of periods, and the persistent movement of run-on sentences. Here di Prima is also teaching us how to read her work: whatever desire is, it is what occurs in the asemantic space between her lines—"hope" here synonymous with "desire," and placed between the two lines of parentheses—and yet is actualized only by virtue of her speaking these lines in the first place. The parenthetical expression of hope also most clearly articulates the affirmation of chance and necessity, it acknowledges that stepping between the lines is never guaranteed, but that one must make a move regardless of the circumstances. Lastly, in the passage the poem takes from imprisonment<sup>34</sup> to mobility, asemantic to semantic, and individual to plural (the sudden introduction of the pronoun "we" in the second-to-last line). What we can conclude from these correlations is that for di Prima, desire is a force which is prior to its mediation in a semantic field; and this semantic field functions on many different planes—the economy (mediation through capital), social existence (mediation through speech and cultural representations), and the poetry itself (mediation through language).

While it may seem as if di Prima's idea of revolution is doing away with the symbolic altogether, that is not actually the position she takes within *Revolutionary Letters*. The problem is not the symbolic itself, but rather capitalism, which ossifies the social organization of desire and relational possibilities by equating capital with speech, routing all expressions of desire towards exploitative and ecologically destructive ends. She uses her speech to negate this fundamental condition of capitalism in "Revolutionary Letter #30":

...remember to

tell the truth, just before they buy you, tell the truth

loud, and the kids will hear you, not hear your money

as it falls on the liquorstore counter, day after day" (di Prima 43).

In addition to showing how tightly bound speech is to capital, these lines clearly illustrate the themes of negation and repetition present in *Revolutionary Letters*. Negation is one of the primary methods of utopic imagination, negative statements are pervasive in her text, repeated over and over again as

<sup>34</sup> The enjambment of "I have no other / ransom money" transforms the claim of the self with no symbolic equivalent to a self under symbolic duress.

if they will abolish the depressing reality di Prima so despises. By virtue of negation occurring again and again in the text, it is semantically linked to repetition. Repetition of course occurs as a formal quality of the text, but also is tied to the reproduction of capital, the money that “falls on the liquorstore counter, day after day.”

### III. The Dialectic of Desire

Negation and repetition also happen to be primary features of dialectic, as proposed by Hegel. Moreover, Lacan considers desire to be the negative, while the death drive is the human being's unconscious urge to merge with the negative. This desire to merge with the negative is exactly the same as the desire to return to a state of wholeness prior to mediation in the symbolic—which, according to Lacan, is first realized and internalized the moment a child gazes at and recognizes the unity of her body in her own reflection. Drives then, are not foundational for Lacan, but rather expressions of desire, automatic modalities wired into the human body. This would mean that lack is what constitutes a human subject. What is important to note here is the difference between negation and negativity. The former, as a verb, suggests agentiality (a dialectician who negates), intentionality, and process, while the latter suggests the nominalization of process in the melancholic wish to merge with the thing-itself. Based on what we have considered thus far, Di Prima would invert Lacan's argument about the constitution of subjectivity: while desire may only be expressed in castrated forms, it is not castration that constitutes the subject, but mobility; and castration is simply what enables the subject to express desire in the social. She is not arguing that desire is negative as an a priori fact, but that it is merely negative as we perceive it from the symbolic. Therefore, in order for di Prima to meaningfully talk about and express desire, and in order for human beings to be capable of expressing desire (in forms up to and including the revolutionary dicethrow) she (and all others) must put it in a dialectic relation. Now we can finally see just in what provisional way desire is the “negative engine”<sup>35</sup> of the dialectic relation itself. But more importantly, within the social, desire is actually the difference between its own terms, it is difference-in-itself.

What I want to call attention to now, is how that which is negated in the dialectical relationship is always also the subordinate term; hence why we are able to nominalize desire in countless different ways, including the word “negativity.” To use a formal example in the text, by the time we get to “Revolutionary Letter #8” we are surprised with strong commands that actually end in periods. While previously the speaker eschewed periods in favor of the mobility of run-on sentences, now she uses their castrating function strategically in order to urgently express what she wants the one she is addressing to do. Later on, in “Revolutionary Letter #18,” the connection between castration and the mobility of desire is made clear:

splitting is an art  
frequently called upon in revolution  
retreat, says the I Ching, must not be confused  
with flight, and furthermore, frequently, it furthers  
ONE TO HAVE SOMEWHERE TO GO.

<sup>35</sup> “Nietzsche & Philosophy,” Gilles Deleuze. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson. 1983.

But in addition to showing how castration enables the mobility of desire in the social, it shows just how desire is expressed in the social as well:

The persons/place you can go to  
Means to get there  
[...] money (cash) in house for traveling  
an extra set of i.d. Robert Williams

[...] one friend  
has two weeks stashed in his VW bus  
food, water, matches, clothing, blankets, gas, he can go  
at least that long, before he hits a town, can leave  
at any time  
something to think about...

Contrary to say, Frank O'Hara, whose poetry contains glamorous indexes of commodities that seem to have an autonomy of their own within the urban landscape, di Prima here emphasizes the fact that commodified means of survival can be obtained through friends, for free. Each means of reproduction listed in this poem is not bought, but given for free through the generosity of a friend who wants to help "you" maintain mobility and evasion in order to intensify the revolutionary struggle. These are example of how a collective desire for revolution becomes expressed through a gift. Food, water, cash, in Revolutionary Letters, love is this caring exchange of gifts between friends. Therefore, love is the social, agential, and formal expression of desire; and together they comprise the historical dialectic that inevitably emancipates all of humanity from exploitation.

#### **IV. Utopia and Desire, What's the Difference? (Modalities of Desire)**

*The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.*

—Muñoz, Jose Esteban (2009-11-01). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (Sexual Cultures) (Kindle Locations 121-124). NYU Press short. Kindle Edition.

At this point in di Prima's work we observe two primary modalities of desire. The first modality of desire is stratified and held within the rigid temporal structure of capitalism, which does everything in power to keep speech and capital tightly bound up with one another, as if their being synonymous was the most natural fact in the world rather than something that must be established through the manifold repetitions of capitalist existence (which encompass mechanical processes, technological transactions, and all the other repetitive behaviors performed by "rational actors" across an endless duration). The hyperbanal capitalist ideology of time reproduces itself in everyday repetitions of behavior, as in the liquorstore scene we discussed earlier, but also, for example,

by delineating the parameters of “common sense” tropes of knowledge that are taken for granted, including history:

what do you want  
your kids to learn, do you care  
if they know factoring, chemical formulae, theory  
of numbers, equations, philosophy, semantics  
symbolic logic, latin, history, socalled, which is  
merely the history of western man, least interesting  
of numberless manifestations on this planet? (di Prima, 35)

This passage shows how di Prima is less than enthusiastic about these repetitions of capitalist tropes, but also just how integral the nominalization of knowledge, and the repetitions of these tropes are to reproducing and naturalizing capitalist temporality. History itself made nominal and universal—history is divested of its history, just like the commodity, and just as desire is nominalized and divested of its history—even the possibility of desire having a history, in the social.

The second modality of desire is more mobile, it is desire when freed from the symbolic tyranny of capital and taken hold of by individuals in a collective act of utopic imagination, intentionally mediated in all its difference by conscious individuals. In “Revolutionary Letter #13,” di Prima calls it

Brahmasastra, hindu weapon of war  
near as I can make out  
a flying wedge of mind energy  
hurled at the foe by god or hero  
or many heroes  
hurled at a problem or enemy  
cracking it

Brahmastastra can be made  
by any or all  
can be made by all of us  
straight or tripping, thinking together  
like : all of us stop the war  
at nine o'clock tomorrow, each take one soldier  
see him clearly, love him, take the gun [...] (di Prima, 24).

Here we have an even stronger claim that human beings have the capacity not just of being agents in history, but of being intentional agents in history. The “flying wedge of mind energy” is intentionally mediated by individuals choosing to arrange in a collective circumstance in order to “crack” what seems to be a monolithic, immovable problem. “Cracking” also suggests, at minimum, a cracking of one thing in two. Thus, it is through the intentional expression of desire by individuals choosing to desire in a collective arrangement, that the seemingly “natural” organization of desire according to the logic of the com-



modity fetish is revealed for what it is: not a given fact, but a rigid, symbolic organization of desire through the economy. Yet all this description is only “near as I can make it,” resonating with Jose Esteban Muñoz’s definition of utopia as something that is always “then and there,” and “made a world that was not quite here yet nonetheless on the horizon.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore we can see that in Revolutionary Letters, di Prima claims that desire as a term in the dialectic of history is always desire for utopia. In the first modality of desire, it becomes the commodity form or as near as the speaker can make it, a utopic objet petit a; in the second modality of desire, it becomes a gift given from the imaginary in the dicethrow of revolutionary struggle.

## V. The Gift of Revolution

But what exactly is the gift? We haven’t yet had a satisfactory discussion regarding this concept. Jacques Derrida offers a useful description of the gift as something that is somehow beyond all oppositions, and yet capable of being given within an economy:

The aporia that surrounds the gift revolves around the paradoxical thought that a genuine gift cannot actually be understood to be a gift. In his text, *Given Time*, Derrida suggests that the notion of the gift contains an implicit demand that the genuine gift must reside outside of the oppositional demands of giving and taking, and beyond any mere self-interest or calculative reasoning (GT 30). According to him, however, a gift is also something that cannot appear as such (GD 29), as it is destroyed by anything that proposes equivalence or recompense, as well as by anything that even proposes to know of, or acknowledge it. This may sound counter-intuitive, but even a simple ‘thank-you’ for instance, which both acknowledges the presence of a gift and also proposes some form of equivalence with that gift, can be seen to annul the gift (cf. MDM 149).<sup>37</sup>

In other words, the gift precisely embodies the antagonism of love and desire, and its fundamentally utopic impulse, all of which we’ve been charting throughout this whole paper. We observe, as Derrida does, that it is an intentional, performative speech-act that can both unleash and castrate desire within the social, and that it is the dialectic movement of these two functions negating one another endlessly. What this means, finally, is that poetic speech for di Prima can bring revolutionary struggle to an “immediate head,” a singular, univocal affirmation in the two moments of the dicethrow—of chance when first thrown, and of necessity in the received number (di Prima, 7); and the historical dialectic is not a means towards a final revolutionary ends, but rather affirmation in the eternal return of the gift. The following excerpt expresses just this idea at the level of the dialectic form of ends and means:

‘DOES THE END

JUSTIFY THE MEANS?’ this is

36 Muñoz, Jose Esteban (2009-11-01). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (Sexual Cultures) (Kindle Locations 2284-2285). NYU Press short. Kindle Edition.

37 Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. “Jacques Derrida (1930—2004),” Jack Reynolds. <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/derrida/#SH7a>>

Process, there is no end, there are only

Means, each one

Had better justify itself.

To whom? (di Prima, 39)

But “Revolutionary Letter #9” also makes this claim about the gift as it concerns actual labor and social relationships. In the first stanza, di Prima makes a difference between the act of advocating the overthrow of the government—sedition in speech, which is a crime—and the act itself of overthrowing the government. She then briefly outlines a simple starting plan for revolution, which includes insurrectionary violence and destroying the value of money by gutting corporate industry and producing money freely for everyone, “as much as they want / and see what happens” (di Prima, 19). And finally, in addition to advocating the negation of money’s value through printing and giving it unconditionally to everyone,

let no one work for another

except for love, and what you make

above your needs be given to the tribe

a Common-Wealth (di Prima, 19).

We can see she advocates an economy based in collectivity, generosity, and the gift. In other words, collectivization requires the the generosity of individuals in relationship to one another, with their speech and actions united in a dynamic relationality. Answering the question of why di Prima might have chosen poetry to express her ideas, I conclude that poetry is the site where, in exercising utopic imagination one brings all the antagonisms of capitalism—which in the most abstract sense are antagonisms of inarticulable desire and its economic/symbolic structuration—to bear, shedding light on the fact that desire has a history in love, and that love’s future can be radically altered in the hopes of moving closer to the utopia on the horizon.

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# Capitalist Mass Media and Tempo

Danny Vagnoni

Scholars have long argued that the language of political discourse, among other factors, is a key influence on the bounds and nature of politics. George Orwell, originally in *Politics And The English Language* and later in 1984, suggested that political discourse -- the language of politics -- requires careful thought and that the increasing "decay" of English in modernity ultimately has political consequences ( *Politics and the English Language* 1). Capitalist mass media is, perhaps, the most easily observable and grave instance of the decay of political discourse -- and, moving from modernity to postmodernity and the Information Era, capitalist mass media moves to the eminently documented and documentable internet. As the primary frame for the decay of political language, Hartmut Rosa's essential text, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, offers a view of capitalist modernity that argues that institutions are caught in a "feedback system," largely fueled by the capitalist mandate to increase the frequency of cycles of production and consumption in order to generate ever more profit (Rosa 157). Applied to media, capitalist mass media increases tempo with production cycles, or otherwise experiences what Rosa calls "desynchronization" -- literally, being out of time with societal structures (Rosa 17). Thus, media manifests in more and more accelerated forms, with the viral clickbait website, BuzzFeed, being the current apex of this phenomenon. Mass media under capitalism, then, serves in its own feedback system; political systems and actions in late modernity are complex and demand careful discourse. However, accelerated production and consumption precludes the ability of media to decelerate, thus mainstream political discourse reduces political action to a minimum in order to keep pace with modern society. This contributes to the acceleration of the pace of life and the phenomenon which presupposes the reduction of political discourse itself.

Orwell's *Politics And The English Language* addresses a number of Rosa's concerns about social acceleration, without specifically naming acceleration as the root cause as Rosa does. Orwell begins *Politics And The English Language* with a self-conscious lament about the state of the English language, especially in regards to political discourse,

It follows that any struggle against the abuse of language is a sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light or hansom cabs to aeroplanes[...]. Now, it is clear that the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes: it is not due simply to the bad influence of this or that individual writer. But an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely" ( *Politics and the English Language* 1).

What Orwell describes as a "sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light" reflects a similar passage in Hartmut Rosa's *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* ( *Politics and the English Language* 1). Rosa has a number of terms that reflect Orwell's sentimentality, ranging from "the emergency brake" to "a radical and revolutionary exit from history" to, most importantly, "a revolution against progress" (Rosa 321-22). The sentimentality that

Orwell expresses in *Politics And The English Language* is in some senses a desire for Rosa's revolution against progress.

What Orwell misconstrues in his theories across both *Politics* and *1984* (in the invented Newspeak) is the ideological dimension of the shape of language, and the point in the feedback cycle that ultimately causes the phenomenon of language decay (1984). While Orwell correctly identifies that the English language has an ideological dimension, "the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes," he fails to identify that *speed itself* can and is an ideological dimension of capitalist modernity, and a major one (*Politics and the English Language* 1).

What Orwell calls the decay of language can, in relation to democracy, capitalism, and political discourse, be formulated as a *desynchronization of language*. This is to say, the language of capitalism and the language of democracy are not compatible, are unable to achieve synergy. Rosa argues that democratic political steering is essentially too slow for capitalist modernity:

This is particularly true for aspirations of democratic control: as will be shown, democratic will formation and decision-making processes are not only time consuming per se, but even develop an increasing need for time because of late modern transformations of associational structures and the public sphere. As a result of this temporal desynchronization, the relation between political steering and social acceleration in developed industrial states has almost completely reversed[...]holding on to such aspirations of steering and regulation proves to be primarily an economic brake (Rosa 205).

The language of capitalism, then, puts extreme pressure on the language of democratic discourse to accelerate. On the other hand, the language of democracy requires a long time to develop, and theoretically pressures capitalist structure to decelerate. The question arises, then, which pressure is greater and which system "wins" this desynchronous conflict.

Accelerated cycles of capitalist consumption make a number of demands on mainstream discourse. The first and most visible of these demands is the demand for consumption. *The Propaganda Model Revisited* suggests that, "[media] performance is incompatible with a truly democratic political culture" (Herman). In Chomsky's and Herman's formulation, this is because of the number of ideological filters that news media must pass through before the public is exposed to stories considered *newsworthy*. Chomsky and Herman identify five filters. Two of these filters are especially relevant to the acceleration of mass media in capitalism. They are: the need for an environment supportive of capitalism, so that advertising can take place without critical analysis (incidentally, the constant *interruption* of advertising in mass media is an additional hindrance to focused democratic discourse, to be discussed later); the dominant ideology, again one of capitalism but also one of *anti-ism* (at various times anti-communism, anti-terrorism, and so on) (Herman).

The structure of mass media alone gives the answer to the question of time-competition between democracy and capitalism, ultimately. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman outline the function of mass media in their influential concept of the Propaganda Model. Because "the mainstream media, as elite institutions, commonly frame news and allow debate only within the parameters of elite interests," it is then safe to assume that the dominating voices in public discourse are that of mainstream media (Herman). Herman adds that "the dominant media are firmly imbedded in the market structure[...]They are profit-seeking businesses, owned by very wealthy people[...]they are largely funded by advertisers who are also profit-seeking entities, and who want their ads to

appear in a supportive selling environment" (Herman). Taking these two points into account -- the dominance of mass media and the ownership of mass media by elite capitalist forces -- implies a foregone conclusion. There is, in essence, no direct conflict between democracy and capitalism, because capitalism has, in late modernity, already hijacked the dominant vehicle of potential democratic discourse. Thus, democracy and capitalist discourse remain desynchronized but further take place in different spheres, as capitalism has already always won the competition for time.

The struggle for time resources in capitalism is, in fact, a long struggle with an important history. Rosa asserts that time in capitalist modernity there is,

A threefold decoupling of industrial work time from traditional time patterns of everyday life. 1. In the first place, the time of wage labor was bound to the standards of the mechanical clock and thus completely separated from the rhythms of nature that had structured social life[...]. The decoupling is visible in a particularly drastic form in shift work, which is, as Marx underscored in *Capital*, a[n][...] natural consequence of the fact that time remains without qualities in the capitalist economy; in runs during the day and at night, in summers as in winters, at the same pace and in a linear fashion (Rosa 165).

So much so does capitalism inhabit the temporal spheres of modernity, that capitalism attempts to appropriate the force of labor for all twenty-four hours, each day. This has a number of effects on the sphere of democratic discourse, all contrary to the time-consuming and collective nature of democracy at a fundamental level.

First, no time is safe from capitalist language-intrusions. Between the time spent at work (which differs based on shifts for most workers) and the time-space allotted for *political discourse*, that is, capitalist discourse through the mass media, there is scarcely an hour of the day that citizens, even individuals who put forth a cursory effort to be informed and involved politically, are not exposed to mainstream consumerist and capitalist discourse.

Second, *shift work* appropriates labor for all twenty-four hours of each day, fragmenting the available opportunities to participate collectively in democracy. With shift work ensuring that production, and by extension consumption, can occur during any of the *qualityless* hours of a day cycle, work is necessarily done in a time-environment where collective patterns are, in Rosa's words, "dissolved in favor of a 'qualityless,' perpetual time of simultaneity" (Rosa 165). With capitalist production occurring simultaneously to the temporal space for democratic action, it becomes impossible for workers to collectively synchronize their temporal spheres of lifetime (work, leisure, political, rest) in a way that allows them to effectively participate in the greater discourse of democracy.

There is another aspect to the twenty-four hour society, another quality to capitalism's *time without time*, *time without quality*, and that aspect returns, at last, directly to the media sphere, ironically a major threat to democratic discourse. Mugdha Rai and Simon Cottle, in their essay *Global mediations: On the changing ecology of satellite television news*, argue that,

In reality a 'CNNization' of television news is taking place: networks such as CNN and the BBC remain the agenda setters in the global news market with smaller, regional players monitoring their content and adopting their models of production [emphasis added]. Rather than a diversified 'global public sphere', then, these regional channels represent a universalization of 'US-style' journalism and an increasing ho-

mogenization of news structures and content around the world (Thussu, 2003) (Rai, Cottle 4).

The so called rise of twenty-four hour news coverage has a number of effects, ranging from factual errors on the simplistic end to a major force for social acceleration on the other (Rosenburg). Ultimately, what this means for the temporal-space of democratic discourse is that, in addition to twenty-four hour production and consumption, in addition to conflicting spheres of rest, work, and leisure, the political sphere is continually dominated by the discourse of mass media with an inherent embedding in capitalist ideology. Here, it is important to recognize the conclusion that twenty four hour media does not offer options, but homogeneous corporate mass media sources steeped inherently in capitalist interest, as discussed with Chomsky and Herman's Propaganda Model. Coupled with the conclusion, already established, that capitalism is not compatible with democracy, and the chronopolitics of capitalism are inherent domination by accelerated capitalist discourse, twenty-four hours per day.

Now that the ubiquity of capitalist discourse has been established, along with the lifeworld of workers and democratic movements in accelerated capitalist modernity, it is pertinent to move on and examine the language of accelerated capitalist modernity. This discourse, as this essay will illustrate, results in the decay of language and a loss of nuance -- these factors then preclude the ability to effectively analyse the state of modernity, already established to be complex, and increasingly so.

Speed and acceleration are ultimately the motors of the decay of language, and, according to Rosa, they operate through the capitalist economic mode (Rosa 74). Marx identified this cause as well, suggesting that the capitalist class, in order to continue existing, needs to "constantly revolutioniz[ing] the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the relations of society as a whole[...]uninterrupted disturbance[...]everlasting uncertainty and movement distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones" (Marx). Marx comes very close to identifying acceleration as ideology (Marx's "everlasting[...]movement" recognizes the kinesis that the elite classes espouse), as Rosa does, and Marx's formulation is essential to Rosa's. According to Rosa,

In the capitalist economic system, however, the continually rising speed of production necessarily goes hand in hand with the escalation of speeds in distribution and consumption, which are in turn driven by technological innovations and thus share responsibility for the fact that the material structures of modern society are reproduced and altered in ever shorter periods of time....simultaneously characterized by an acceleration of processes of organization, decision, administration, and control" (Rosa 74).

Thus, in Rosa's formulation, the ideology of speed is inherently a capitalist ideology. Technological advancement, promoted with a religious zealotry by all manner of mainstream political parties, including conservative parties, though more selectively, is an underlying ideological and social given. Because of this nearly unquestioned support for speed in mainstream discourse, speed, often under the propagandistic moniker of *progress*, has a social equality with morality. Indeed, numerous fascists subscribed explicitly to this new ideology, this, in the words of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Futurist and Mussolini supporter, "*New Religion-Morality of Speed*."

Returning to Orwell, whose writing on the decay of English political discourse is important though carries flaws, no vessel for the acceleration of lan-



guage is more potent than that of the cliché. Though Orwell does not name the cliché as such, he does assert that,

This mixture of vagueness and sheer incompetence is the most marked characteristic of modern English prose, and especially of any kind of political writing. As soon as certain topics are raised, the concrete melts into the abstract and no one seems able to think of turns of speech that are not hackneyed: prose consists less and less of words chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of phrases tacked together like sections of a prefabricated hen-house ( *Politics and the English Language* 2).

It is not the intent of this essay to contend that all political writing is incompetent; however, the authors cited up to this point (including Rosa, Marx, Chomsky and Herman) are unusually erudite. In the late modern context relevant to this essay, mass media, often claiming to lack ideology but dominating the ideological discourse of late modernity, is the prime perpetrator of incompetent political writing.

The “prefabricated hen-house” Orwell refers to is the essence of cliché and its effect on English political discourse ( *Politics and the English Language* 2). From the perspective of sentence construction, writing word-to-word, rather than the phrase-to-phrase writing Orwell designates as characteristic of modern English prose, slows down the writing process. One must understand the intricacies and precision of each word when writing word-to-word; phrase-to-phrase writing, by contrast, requires only that the writer understand the gist of a prefabricated sequence of words -- the cliché. This allows writers to construct discourse much more quickly and, as yet to be proved, palatable to a much greater audience. Additionally, as a cousin to Rosenberg’s discussion of journalistic ineptitude in an accelerated, twenty-four hour media environment in *No Time To Think*, the cliché precludes the writer’s ability to think critically about their own writing. Their writing emerges from a place of uncritical acceptance (the essence of the cliché), and, if it undergoes editorial inspection at all, appears to the editor as vague-enough-to-be-true -- lacking in any sort of authoritative meaning, but, to the editor’s perception, not explicitly false either.

The “prefabricated hen-house” adopts another meaning, though it is unclear if Orwell intended this meaning -- the stagnant nature of capitalist discourse. The hen-house, interestingly attached to the word *prefabricated* implying both speed as well as connoting capitalist production, allows for only certain ideological discourses. *Prefabricated* by the mass media elite in capitalism, clichéd discourse, in the words of Herman, “commonly frame[s] news and allow[s] debate only within the parameters of elite interests[...]where ordinary citizens are not aware of their own stake in an issue or are immobilized by effective propaganda, the media will serve elite interests uncompromisingly (Herman).

The cliché is the continued reconstruction of the vaguest and most palatable elements of capitalist discourse in late modernity. As already discussed, Rosa declares that the time in capitalism has monetary value (to engage in a bit of hypocrisy: *time is money*) and is without quality. The idea that “material structures of modern society are reproduced and altered in ever shorter periods of time,” the appropriation of not just labor but language into the twenty-four hour cycle, the experience of time Rosa refers to as the “ *short-short* pattern,” is highly relevant here (Rosa 142).

In mass media, the viral clickbait website BuzzFeed epitomizes the *short-short* pattern of time as it applies to political language. On February 4, 2014, BuzzFeed published its internal style guide -- the guidelines BuzzFeed

writers must adhere to when writing their articles. In BuzzFeed's own words, "BuzzFeed publishes news and entertainment in the language of the web, and in our work we rely on a style guide to govern everything from hard-hitting journalism to fun quizzes....This style guide will be updated regularly to ensure it remains relevant and responds accordingly to changes in language and common, casual usage (Favilla, Paolone). Though an online news source, and with frequent articles appealing to the moderately liberal white populace, BuzzFeed nonetheless adheres to the propaganda model. BuzzFeed always conducts discourse in the prefabricated hen-house and often represents a relatively liberal viewpoint within that paradigm, but only on issues "where the elites are divided" (Herman).

At any rate, BuzzFeed's own writing manifesto is illustrative of its role in the decay of the English language. In a review of BuzzFeed's style guide published in *TIME*, Steinmetz says that, "News organizations' style guides, along with fusty cousins like dictionaries and encyclopedias, don't have a reputation for being super-casual or quick to adapt....But the situation is different over at BuzzFeed" (Steinmetz). Indeed, BuzzFeed's abuse of language stems from its speed, following cultural trends and ensuring that BuzzFeed keeps pace with the breakneck speed of internet culture -- a microcosm of the feedback system where BuzzFeed itself feeds viral elements of language which propagate, alter, and return to BuzzFeed. BuzzFeed's Word List (part of their internal style guide) is a litany of these whiplash adaptations to internet culture; while Steinmetz refers to them as "zeitgeist-y language trends," it remains that BuzzFeed's attempt to stay synchronized with accelerated media culture has malevolent effects on political discourse. BuzzFeed and mass media like it undermine democratic discourse, and facilitates a consumer capitalist culture that is highly desynchronized due to frenetic media production, consumption, and lack of consistency or language capable of building identity -- BuzzFeed is synchronic (Steinmetz).

BuzzFeed, as a representative of accelerated capitalist mass media, thus poses an identity-threat to the discourse of democracy. On the formation of identity, Rosa says,

If one defines identity as that which lends a subject coherence and continuity across varying contexts, then the concept of situational identity seems to become a sort of *contradictio in adjecto*. Yet if one understands identity as a sense of who one is that provides an ability to orient oneself and to act, then situational identities are quite conceivable as, so to speak, logical vanishing points of heightened individualization and acceleration[...]Ultimately the concept simply indicates that there are no longer any definitions of identity that are *per se* temporally stable (Rosa 239).

Applied to the abuse of discourse by capitalist mass media, this ultimately robs the democratic discourse of both substance and form. Orwell's prefabricated hen-house (the cliché) limits political discourse to the substance of accelerated capitalism; incompatible with democracy. Media outlets like BuzzFeed, following the ideology of breakneck speed, limits the form, the identity of potential democratic action. In Rosa's formulation, this constitutive lack of substance and form means that democratic movements face a double dilemma of identity. Unable to form an identity and thus unable to "orient oneself and to act," democratic movements must inherently be subversive to capitalism and accelerated capitalist time-structure, or else become ineffectual and relegate themselves to facilitating the domination of speed.

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# The Silicon Ideology

Josephine Armistead

**ABSTRACT:** Out of the technological centres of the world has come a new, strange variant of fascism—namely, neo-reaction, or “NRx”. I shall here provide a critique of this ideology and an attempt at understanding of its origins, its tactics, and how it may be defeated.

**Content Warnings:** This article contains discussions of fascism, Nazism, white supremacy, and the Holocaust among other topics.

## I. Introduction

When one learns I am studying a new emergence of fascism in Europe and North America, one might be tempted to believe I am referring to the larger trend of the rise of right-wing populist parties and candidacies that may be considered “fascist”, such as the candidacy of Donald Trump and the rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), Le Pen’s Front national (FN), Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), and Golden Dawn among others. However, in this essay, I discuss a more narrow group: specifically, an ideology that has emerged in the past decade or so inside the capitals of the tech world and which is growing at an alarming rate, often (but not always) allied with those parties and candidacies I have mentioned above: neo-reactionaries and what is known as the “alt-right”. Largely, this group has escaped serious criticism by radicals for its nature as a small, internet-based ideology—not enough people, it seems, take it seriously. Indeed, some may question why I am taking it seriously: clearly, this group is just “a bunch of nerds” with no relation to “the real world” and no influence to speak of: what am I worried about? To which I respond thusly: I do not take it for granted that this odd ideology will not grow (indeed, it already is growing), I do not believe we should under-estimate our enemies, and most people severely under-rate the influence of the alt-right, which is, especially in Silicon Valley, already courting influential figures, such as Peter Thiel of PayPal, many of whom belong to a particular ideological predecessor of neo-reactionary thought: namely, the techno-utopian right-libertarianism pervasive in the tech industry.

## II. On the Various Theoretical Accounts of Fascism and its Origins

In order to understand, neo-reaction, a neo-fascist ideology, one must too understand fascism in its first flowering. This is harder than it may first appear: every theorist and her dog has a pet theory of the origins and definitions of fascism, and I do not wish to spend this essay deciding which is “best”. Perhaps, then, we should merely determine which is most useful in understanding neo-reaction. Traditionally, fascism has been amorously defined among the Left by the statement given in 1933 to the 13th meeting of the Enlarged Executive of the (Third) Communist International in Moscow: “Fascism is the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, most imperialist elements of finance capital” (found in ): this, though a useful summary, is not useful as a theory.

### **a. Amadeo Bordiga**

Amadeo Bordiga claimed that fascism was merely another form of bourgeois rule, and there was nothing exceptional about it compared to bourgeois democracy or constitutional monarchy—indeed, nothing particularly reactionary about it. This theory is exceptionally useless, so we shall not consider it any further.

### **b. Leon Trotsky**

In , a posthumously-published pamphlet made from selections of earlier writings (from 1922 to 1940), Leon Trotsky argues that fascism is a specific form of counter-revolutionary dictatorship, not all of them. He identifies the social base of fascism as the petty-bourgeoisie and “middle class”, as well as the lumpenproletariat. This happens, according to Trotsky, when the “normal” repressive apparatus of bourgeois-democracy fails to keep a stable society, and the base of fascism has been dispossessed and brought to desparation. Fascism, when in power, begins by destroying workers’ organizations and class-consciousness, subjecting the proletariat to an administrative system which renders the organization of the proletariat quite difficult, to say the least. then embarks on an analysis of how the Italian fascists gained power: after World War I, socialists had begun to seize one factory after another—all it needed, Trotsky claimed, was to coördinate. But then the social democrats disrupted the revolutionary action, “sprung back”, and withdrew, hoping docile workers would help shift public opinion against fascists and allow for reform, banking on the support of Victor Emmanuel III. The fascists then seized Bologna and soon gained the backing of Victor Emmanuel III and the haute bourgeoisie. At the last moment, the social democrats called for a general strike, but by then it was too late. Within two years, Mussolini was in power, and began to create a bureaucracy and military dictatorship. Germany soon followed the same model: indeed, in 1932, Trotsky notes how the reformists have started to rely on—and put their faith in—the government (now ruled by a series of chancellors installed through emergency decrees: Brüning, von Papen, von Schleicher) to put down fascism. This is especially frustrating for Trotsky, as he notes that these same conditions could—and should—propel forth a revolutionary party. Trotsky then criticises the Comintern policy of “social-fascism” and calls for a United Front with a well-organized militia. In September 1932, Trotsky claims that bourgeois rule falls in three stages: Jacobinism at the dawn of capitalism, when the bourgeoisie needed revolution; democracy in mature capitalism; and fascism in late capitalism, when the bourgeoisie must “clamp down” further on proletarian revolution. When the bourgeoisie begins to decline, it relies on the petty bourgeoisie to keep the proletariat down.

There are some practical predictive errors with Trotsky’s theory. In 1922, he predicted the bourgeoisie would abandon fascism upon defeat of the revolution. In 1938, Trotsky advised the Czechoslovakian workers not to resist German invasion, in 1939, supported (based on testimonies of Ukrainian émigrés) the creation of an independent Ukraine when Germany had targeted Ukraine as part of its lebensraum, and in 1940 predicted that World War 2 would end either in world-revolution or world-fascism.

### **c. Marxism-Leninism-Maoism**

In H. (2009), it is argued (by a person identified only as “Scott H.”) that:

1. Fascism is one of the two major forms of bourgeois class rule, the other being bourgeois democracy. There are no primary differences, but there are secondary differences: namely, in bourgeois democracy, there is qualitatively more freedom to openly express opinions, protest, and organize, regardless of whether or not there are "elections": the "democratic" part of bourgeois democracy, being largely limited to the bourgeoisie, is irrelevant

2. Whether or not a regime is fascist is determined by how the bourgeoisie exerts its dictatorship over other classes: what freedoms are the proletariat (not merely other bourgeois parties) allowed (however temporarily) to exert?

3. How the regime treats revolutionaries and revolutionary parties (along with the militant mass movements they lead) is especially key in determining whether a regime is fascist or not

4. The role of terrorism: both bourgeois democracy and fascism rely on terrorism, but fascism is much more terroristic than bourgeois democracy

5. Fascism and bourgeois democracy are theoretical extremes or archetypes: all bourgeois regimes have elements of both types

6. Regimes can be classified as either fascist or bourgeois democratic based on which theoretical archetype they approximate more closely

7. Laws or actions of a bourgeois state can be categorized as fascist if they correspond to the actions of the fascist theoretical archetype and if they occur in a regime overall categorized as fascist

8. It is possible for a bourgeois state to rule in different ways in different areas (and at different times), so it is possible for a state to be fascist in one area and a bourgeois-democracy in another area

9. Bourgeois democracy is unstable and fascism is virtually inevitable under bourgeois rule, especially as the bourgeoisie faces a crisis or nears its overthrow

10. Struggle against fascist policies and laws of a bourgeois democracy is a struggle for reforms (though not necessarily reformism)

Two points are then made regarding historical Marxist-Leninist approaches to fascism. First, the Third International was in error in the 1930s when it recommended to the KPD not to form a (temporary) unified front against the Nazis with the SPD—but was also in error when, after the Nazis took power in 1933, they promoted a United Front Against Fascism which called on socialist parties to so closely ally with bourgeois-democratic parties (like the SPD) that they became reformists themselves, glorifying bourgeois-democracy—hollowing out the revolutionary core of such a party. Secondly, revisionist states (like the USSR under Khrushchev) are "social-fascist"—i.e. fascist, being repressive bourgeois states. Two case studies are presented: the US is diagnosed as a bourgeois-democratic state with elements of fascism, and India is diagnosed as semi-fascist and growing towards fascism (particularly in its treatment of the adivasis and the Naxalites, who are both repressed under the UAPA and "Operation Green Hunt" with child soldiers in paramilitary death-squads similar to the Freikorps such as Chhattisgarh's Salwa Judum and Bihar's Ranvir Sena).

As we see, this gives an account of what fascism is (though in general terms), but very little of where it comes from, how it may be fought, &c &c (this is acknowledged in the essay)—except that bourgeois democracy often transforms into fascism during periods of instability, crisis, or overthrow.

#### **d. Walter Benjamin**

Walter Benjamin's account of fascism relied on a concept known as the aestheticization of politics developed in his influential 1936 essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, among others. Indeed, in , we see the following passage:

The masses have a right to changed property relations; fascism seeks to give them expression in keeping these relations unchanged. The logical outcome of fascism is an aestheticizing of political life

What does this mean? To understand it, we must understand it in its context. According to Benjamin (though this notion is not exclusive to him), fascism blocks and diverts the energies that otherwise would be used to form a revolution against capitalism—it fills the void provided by an unsuccessful or non-existent revolution, and must be understood from this perspective. To put it succinctly with a Benjamin quote: “Behind every fascism, there lies a failed revolution”. It offers the emotional release of a revolution while effecting no material change—and the production of this catharsis is easily seen in the propaganda of the era.

If fascism implies the aestheticization of politics, Benjamin reasons, it must be related to the traditional Marxist notion of commodity fetishism. Indeed, fascism presents, according to Benjamin, the promise of revolution, a strong, self-reliant, and harmonious state &c as a commodity. In order to maintain the fascist movement and control over the intense emotional release it provides while refusing to challenge capitalism, fascism relies on war, which also creates enough expenditure to temporarily resolve crises of overproduction, like the Great Depression. Benjamin connects the aestheticization of war with an artistic-political movement in Italy which preceded fascism and whose proponents became fascists: Futurism. Futurists celebrated technology, speed, and aggression: and technology is an aspect of war that is easily aestheticized. While human suffering is usually omitted in the aestheticization of war, in a fascist mode destruction, too, must be aestheticized, not merely edited out. Benjamin, in “Theories of German Fascism” connects this to Ernst Jünger’s ‘war for war sake’: Jünger mysticises war as a magical force, which the State must be “worthy” of. This, Benjamin claims, derives easily from Jünger’s experience as an officer, not a mere grunt—and indeed, the Nazis saw their first support base from disgruntled World War I officers, such as Hitler himself—and the Freikorps.

#### **e. Deleuze and Guattari**

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in their 1972 book *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L’anti-Œdipe*, reprise an earlier analysis of fascism by Wilhelm Reich in his 1933 work *Die Massenpsychologie des Faschismus*. They argue in that fascism is created through libidinal and psychological repression through the mechanism of the nuclear family, which represses and distorts the desires of the child, making them a docile subject that is easily controlled and will submit. The Œdipus complex is seen as arising from the familial suppression and distortion of desires: says: “It is in one and the same movement that the repressive social production is replaced by the repressing family, and that the latter offers a displaced image of desiring-production that represents the repressed as incestuous familial drives.” Deleuze and Guattari can be here criticised for using the term “fascism” to refer to this, because it seems to divorce fascism from its historical context and from a larger social context: while this may indeed be an integral part of fascism, I don’t think we can reduce fascism to this. Deleuze and Guattari have anticipated this, and so this repression and distortion of desire on a small scale has been termed “microfascism”, as opposed to “macrofascism”.



## **f. A Unified Theory**

One issue with many, but not all, of the analyses of fascism is that they only consider fascism in power, not fascism as an ideology prior to seizure of power. It seems to be generally accepted that fascism is a bourgeois ideology that is fundamentally similar to bourgeois democracy, taking power when bourgeois democracy finds itself unstable and in crisis. Another issue arises, related to the first: as many definitions seem limited to “bourgeois democracy, but worse” (this is especially true of the M-L-M definition), they make it hard to create a clear difference between bourgeois democracy and fascism: for, is the US not engaged in intense terrorism both domestically and across the globe—and has this not been the case since its inception? Here the Bordigist (a true resident of the Grand Hotel Abyss of Lukács) may smugly claim that this is because there is precisely no difference, but I would like us to smack the Bordigist across the head, for this impulse of erasing differences in order to make false equivalences is dangerous indeed. If we cannot distinguish fascism from other forms of bourgeois rule, then we should not complain when we hear the sound of jackboots marching. I would like to first make the proposition that fascism is distinguished from other forms of bourgeois rule both by the degree of action of its terroristic, repressive apparatus but also by the *Weltanschauung* that supports it. Like Benjamin notes, the aestheticization of war in bourgeois democracy requires the erasure of human suffering, but under fascism, the aestheticization of war relies upon scenes of destruction. Because fascism relies on war to channel the emotions used to aestheticize politics, it relies on nationalism (justifying war) and class collaboration (what in China was the line of two unite in one as opposed to one divides in two, justifying the lack of change in property relations). Nationalism relies on essentialism (the idea of an eternal, unchangeable inherent nature preceding human existence), a form of idealism. It is important to note that I am not here positing a timeless, universal Form of fascism, but rather a way of understanding characteristics of fascism that would provide its backbone and which have mutated into a new form: a fascism of the 21st century, which, though very different in ways from 20th century fascism (finding its roots in neoliberalism, not Victorian liberalism), is clearly derived and indebted to it.

Here, then, are some diagnostic features that might help understand and recognize fascism:

1. Fascism is one of two forms of bourgeois rule, the other being bourgeois democracy. There are no primary differences, but there are secondary differences

2. Fascism emerges in the shadow of a failed revolution; that is, at times when bourgeois rule is weak, but a revolution has either failed, been betrayed by centrist, “Social Democrat” forces, or, similarly, been forestalled/delayed: in the latter case, the turn to fascism is an attempt to block a revolutionary movement from forming or gaining success.

3. Fascism transforms politics and its promise of revolutionary change into a commodity—it thusly aestheticizes politics, giving the masses the intensity of emotion associated with revolutionary change but maintaining an even stronger devotion to maintaining bourgeois rule and property-relations

4. In order to maintain these emotions, fascism constructs a *Weltanschauung* that opportunistically ransacks various philosophies of useful concepts and creates an idealistic philosophy that contains nationalism, and class collaboration.

5. This *Weltanschauung* provides the ideological support for war, which is the chief way in which fascism may continually maintain intense emotional response and control them without changing property-relations

6. War, too, is aestheticized—but destruction and suffering are not merely edited out, as in bourgeois democracy, but glorified. In the course of the aestheticization of war, the technology of war is frequently aestheticized as well

7. Both bourgeois democracy and fascism rely on terrorism, but fascism is more terroristic than bourgeois democracy. The freedoms the proletariat (however temporarily) are allowed to exert are larger in bourgeois democracy

8. Fascism and bourgeois democracy are theoretical extremes or archetypes: all bourgeois regimes have elements of both types. The seeds of fascism are in bourgeois democracy: nevertheless, the two can be distinguished.

9. Bourgeois democracy is unstable, and as the bourgeois regime faces a crisis or its overthrow, the bourgeoisie will turn to fascism in order to block the emergence of a successful revolutionary movement

10. Fascism relies on the exploitation of “microfascisms” (the repression and distortion of desiring-production by units and institutions such as the nuclear family) among the populace to create docile subjects that desire their own repression.

### **III. A History of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fascism**

#### **a. The Ideological Influences Upon Fascism**

Fascists claim many influences, stretching back to ancient times. Hitler and Ioannis Metaxas both idolized the Spartans under Lycurgus, understood through Karl Müller's *Die Dorier*, an essentialist fantasia about the history of the Dorians. Mussolini preferred Plato, but apart from that, sought to connect Fascist Italy with Imperial Rome, idolizing Julius Caesar and Augustus. From then, we see the emphasis on the state and absolutism in Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Hegel. The tradition of essentialist German nationalism began with Johann Gottfried Herder, and was quickly used for anti-Semitic ends. Fascism rejects the French Revolution and its legacy, though learns from its methods. Influences from this era include Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who furthered the project of German nationalism as well as Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre, arch-conservatives. As the 19th century progressed, liberal ideology, then as now, found inspiration in biology, and thus created a capitalist interpretation of biology: Social Darwinism, born from Spencer's reading of Malthus and Darwin (though it owed more, originally, to Lamarck). It only took a jump from there to eugenics (a liberal project, formulated by Sir Francis Galton FRS and supported by Alexander Graham Bell, Winston Churchill, Theodore Roosevelt, John Maynard Keynes, Francis Crick, James Watson, and Margaret Sanger: indeed, implemented first in America through compulsory sterilization, which has not truly ended), and this, too, coöperated well with Gobineau's racialism, creating the liberal ideology of scientific racism (justifying immigration restriction and anti-miscegenation laws among others) and its nightmare scenario: degeneration theory, as promoted by Max Nordau in his 1892 work *Degeneration*. It is important to emphasize that all of this was well-accepted within Anglo-American liberalism: indeed, the first eugenics program was created in California. Wagner's aesthetics were the next ingredient in the Fascist soup, as was the essentialist psychology of Gustave Le Bon, who argued that white men were essentially superior to women and people of colour—this, too, has resurfaced in the field of evolutionary psychology and the book *The Bell Curve*. Nietzsche's rhetoric inspired the fascists, with an attack on collectivism, the concept of the *Übermensch*, and the recuperation of Schopenhauer's will-to-live as the will-to-power. Henri Bergson's “*élan vital*” centring around free choice al-

lowed a rejection of materialism. Gaetano Mosca's *The Ruling Class* (1896) claimed that in all societies, an organized minority will rule a disorganized majority, and that the structure of the military is a useful guide to structure society, especially due to its officer class—presenting the structure of the military as a model for civil society: this Mussolini is known to have read. Robert Michels' theory of the *Ehernes Gesetz der Oligarchie* (iron law of oligarchy) claimed that democracy would inevitably lead to bureaucratization, hierarchy, and oligarchy—this, too, became useful for fascists. Maurice Barrès' ethnic nationalism was combined with an appeal to patriotism, militarism, charismatic leadership and a hero myth. Mikhail Bakunin's concept of propaganda of the deed and direct action would go on to influence fascist tactics and propaganda. Georges Sorel's anarchism promoted nationalism, the power of myth, and "moral regeneration". Charles Maurras, a reactionary, showed interest in Sorel's syndicalism: Enrico Corradini did the work of merging it with right-wing nationalism: speaking of Italy as essentially a "proletarian nation" which needed to engage in imperialism to challenge Britain and France, and needed to reject democracy, liberalism, Marxism, internationalism, and pacifism—promoting violence, heroism, and vitalism instead. This was furthered by the artistic-political movement of Futurism.

What we see here is an idealistic liberal idea of science and progress justifying a deeply reactionary social structure, which itself learns tactics from its leftist enemies.

## **b. The Interwar Period**

World War I was formative for fascism, and the period immediately following it was ripe ground for fascists, making their first gains through Józef Piłsudski's military takeover of Poland during the 1918-20 Polish-Soviet war (and later 1926 coup), Benito Mussolini's 1922 takeover of Italy, and Hitler's failed (though useful) 1923 Beer Hall Putsch. The general mood was one of pessimism and betrayal; public confidence in finance capital was at an all-time low. Surely, this should be fertile ground for the Revolution, should it not? Indeed it was, as seen through the October Revolution in Russia, the 1919 revolution in Hungary, the brief-but-still Bavarian Soviet Republic, the Biennio Rosso of Italy, the Seattle General Strike of 1919, and the Spartacus Uprising in Germany. None of these revolutions except for the October Revolution lasted for more than two years. What happened? Let us take Italy and Germany as models. In Italy, as Trotsky has related above, whatever gains workers had made through agitation were erased by the reformists, who thought that a more moderate, peaceful approach was necessary in order to maintain "public opinion": soon, the workers were in retreat and the fascists took over. In Germany, the Spartacus Uprising was crushed by the Social Democrats, who enlisted the help of the reactionary Freikorps paramilitaries that would later form the basis of the SA and SS. In both cases, the centrist, moderate, reformist, even liberal elements of the left—Social Democrats—got cold feet and betrayed and violently suppressed a revolutionary movement before its prime in favor of a "business-as-usual" reformist negotiation with finance capital. The conceding of the Left and its engagement in politics-as-usual allowed fascism to portray itself as the ideology of systemic change (aestheticizing radical politics).

## **IV. Neo-Reaction and its Historical and Discursive Origins**

We have discussed historical fascism at length. What then is neo-reaction? Neo-reaction is a 21st century variant of fascism: a new ideology that values stability, order, efficiency, and "good governance" above all, or claims to.

The actual beliefs of most neo-reactionaries are somewhat varied, but the core beliefs, as summed up by the neo-reactionary Anissimov are (paraphrased): (1) a rejection of equality, (2) a commitment to right-wing politics, (3) a commitment to hierarchy, (4) a commitment to traditional sex roles, (5) a rejection of libertarianism, and (6) a rejection of democracy. Obviously, this is somewhat vague, and the commonalities do indeed go further than these six points. Thus, here is a perhaps more comprehensive list of the backbone of neo-reactionary values:

1. Transhumanism and faith in the power of technology as a means towards other ends.

2. An authoritarian form of government. In more “moderate” or “reasonable” forms, this takes the form of running the country as a joint-stock corporation (this, for example, is Moldbug’s position), which is well within the norm of neoliberal thought. This, however, blends into calling for monarchy and aristocracy in more “extreme” variants (if we can classify them as “moderate” and “extreme”), with the ruler usually in either case being either a tech CEO (with several proposals being floated to make Eric Schmidt or Elon Musk or Peter Thiel “CEO of America”) or a super-intelligent machine mind. The neo-reactionaries hope to be the aristocrats, or, sometimes, monarchs of their own in a patchwork of principalities somewhat reminiscent of the Holy Roman Empire.

3. The belief in a “Cathedral”, similar to the role ideology plays in Leftist theory, but one that pushes progressive ends (feminism, multiculturalism, democracy, equality)—and a hostility towards this “Cathedral”

4. White (or, less frequently, East Asian, or, still less frequently, South Asian) nationalism, accompanied by scientific racism, eugenics, social Darwinism, degeneration theory, biological determinism, and a belief that ethnic uniformity increases social capital. Very frequently accompanied with anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitic canards of the early 20th century. Almost always accompanied with Islamophobia.

5. Faith in the Austrian School of Economics, or, less frequently, its more ‘respectable’, less obviously astrological, cousin the Chicago School

6. Extreme misogyny based in evolutionary psychology, the active promotion of rape—stemming from this belief in traditional gender roles, extreme homophobia and transphobia

7. Cultural touchstones in war-based video games and tabletop games (such as the Imperium in Warhammer 40,000) along with “The Matrix” (a movie, ironically, written and directed by two trans women partially about gender theory—one, in any case, that the NRx-ers have unfortunately clinged on to in bad readings)

8. Among the less academic, an obsession with cuckoldry and the use of mass harassment tactics (death threats, rape threats, DDoS, doxxing, swatting, misinformation campaigns &c) to silence enemies

There are two poles within neo-reaction, the “academic” pole, exemplified in LessWrong and the blogs of the main theorists of the movement (Unqualified Reservations, More Right, Outside In), and the “alt-right” pole, exemplified in 4chan (especially the /pol/ board), 8chan, My Posting Career, and The Right Stuff. The two poles meet on Reddit, Twitter, and Tumblr, among other sites. In addition, neo-reactionary ideas are quite common in Silicon Valley, though often without explicit allegiance to its theory, as can be seen in the statements of Peter Thiel and Balaji Srinivasan, among others.

## V. What is Transhumanism?

Transhumanism, for many, seems to be the part of neo-reactionary ideology that “sticks out” from the rest. Indeed, some wonder how neo-reactionaries and transhumanists would ever mix, and why I am discussing LessWrong in the context of neo-reactionary beliefs. For the last question, this is because LessWrong served as a convenient “incubation centre” so to speak for neo-reactionary ideas to develop and spread for many years, and the goals of LessWrong: a friendly super-intelligent AI ruling humanity for its own good, was fundamentally compatible with existing neo-reactionary ideology, which had already begun developing a futurist orientation in its infancy due, in part, to its historical and cultural influences. The rest of the question, however, is not just historical, but theoretical: what is transhumanism and why does it mix well with a reactionary ideology?

Transhumanism I define to be a collection of movements aimed at improving and enhancing humanity through technological means. Almost immediately, we see a precursor, and one which influenced the previous reactionary ideology of 20th century fascism: eugenics. But let us not tar all transhumanism with eugenics, though it must carry its historical burthen. Transhumanism first gained currency in 1990, though it had been developing from eugenics since the end of the Second World War, often through the medium of science-fiction. In 1965, the notion of technological singularity was developed: of course, the concept of artificial intelligence had been developing earlier. Organized groups of transhumanists began to gather at UCLA in the early 1980s, many of whom would subscribe to the “Third Way” of the 1990s (not to be confused with third positionism, another word for fascism) and thus become either centrists, others, stemming from the Extropians who formed in 1988, were libertarians. As seen in the disputes in 2006 at the World Transhumanist Association and from the ideologies of the Extropians, the libertarians largely did not see the necessity of universalism for a transhumanist project: they thus were comfortable with a class system being strengthened by transhumanism—indeed, reinforced it through the idea of meritocracy. They, too, were more comfortable with the eugenics programs of old, now largely framed (as then) through ableism: preventing “liabilities” (mostly disabled and neurodivergent people, though the more homophobic and transphobic element are looking for biological bases for gay-ness and trans-ness to include them here, and racists of course include people of colour) as opposed to “assets” from being born. This of course is a reflection of the fact that both the eugenics of old and the right-transhumanism (if we can call it that, as opposed to left-transhumanism, which seems largely limited to left-accelerationists and cyberfeminists, both of which are relatively marginal, though I count myself as a left-transhumanist) have applied liberal bourgeois ideology (one might point in particular to utilitarianism). Perhaps now it is clearer how transhumanism—more specifically, right-transhumanism fits here.

## VI. The Historical Origins of Neo-Reaction

In order to understand the historical origins of neo-reaction, we must look at the composition of the neo-reactionaries. That is: what brought them to neo-reaction? What were their interests and beliefs prior to neo-reaction? Through this, we can identify several moments at which it became what it is today. Perhaps the most obvious moment is one of the most recent: GamerGate, a mass harassment campaign transformed into a mob, ready-made to harass women online who dare to speak. But undoubtedly, neo-reaction is older than GamerGate, and it is harder to identify easy “moments” by which discrete but similar

groups merged under the banner of the alt-right, though the movements themselves can be discerned. Thus, I'll take a different approach.

We start now in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1976 with Bill Gates' "Open Letter to Hobbyists". This is an arbitrary starting point, but it is convenient for our purpose. The hobbyist and hacker cultures had a largely communal atmosphere, with sharing and copying being accepted and, indeed, expected. While computers had been (in part, at least) a commercial venture since their birth, this was one of the first times it (successfully) emerged from the hacker and hobbyist cultures and threatened that communal atmosphere. Gates appealed to the value created by labor and the cost of machine time (which, Hal Singer noted, was paid for by Harvard, funded by the US Government, in the case of Altair Basic), but used that to argue for copyright enforcement and commodification. Another process was happening at this time: the creation of the personal computer. This happened in fits and starts throughout the 1970s, but only began to succeed in 1981 when the IBM Pc was released, paired with Microsoft's Ms-dos (bought from Tim Paterson's 86-dos, a rebranded Qdos, copied from CP/M, inspired by Tops-10...)—soon, computers became a mass market. The final gasps of the old hacker culture were breathed in 1983 when its hallowed home, the Mit Ai Lab, was virtually destroyed by the creation of Symbolics, a Lisp Machine startup which did not share its code, leaving only Richard Stallman, who would found Gnu.<sup>1</sup> The coffin was nailed in by the breakup of At&t, which allowed the resulting company to make Unix, a widely-used (if generally considered of bad quality) operating system by virtue of its portability, the simplicity of its code (at the expense of legibility), and the free nature of the codebase, into a commodity. All that was left was now a startup culture, and startups relied on a hierarchical, dictatorial model.

Now let us skip to the 1990s. In 1991, we have our first snippet of the political writings of the man who would later found neo-reaction, Curtis Yarvin (later to be known as Mencius Moldbug)—a message to the Usenet group talk.politics.soviet (drudged up in ), speculating over Gorbachev's role in the August Coup (Yarvin claiming that Gorbachev was indeed behind it, manipulating the Gang of Eight into a trap that ultimately he and Yeltsin would benefit from)—and already, we see the seeds of neo-reaction: "But I wonder if the Soviet power ladder of vicious bureaucratic backbiting brings stronger men to the top than the American system of feel-good soundbites." Yarvin would soon leave writing to make money in the first dot-com bubble; we shall see more of him later. In 1990, Eric S. Raymond emerged, taking over the Jargon File, a cornerstone of the old hacker culture that died in 1983. Raymond is a libertarian; Stallman is a social democrat. In 1998 Raymond piggybacked off of Stallman's concept of free software to create a version more appealing for corporations: open source. From this, and from his maintenance of the Jargon File, Raymond began to play a brief, though influential, role in Silicon Valley culture, which, due to the proliferation of startups suddenly gaining money in the dot-com bubble and to the normalization of neoliberalism under Clinton, was especially receptive to techno-libertarianism. His 1997 essay is of particular interest, for here can be seen the origin of the neo-reactionary term "Cathedral"—it is in the title of Raymond's essay "The Cathedral and the Bazaar", though the meaning was somewhat different, referring in Raymond's essay to a centralized model of software development. We should not see Raymond as the source of techno-libertarianism as much as its most influential exponent at the time, for it was already growing in Usenet as well as in the Bay, and would soon spread to one of the earliest social news sites, Slashdot.

Let us, for a moment, move out of the tech world and into the political material they may have been reading. In 1994, Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray released *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in*

American Life, a pseudo-scientific work that had the effect of making blatant (as opposed to implied) scientific racism respectable again amongst the white professional population. The second edition of *The Mismeasure of Man* was written in opposition, but it was too late: *The Bell Curve* had made the case to pass the 1994 crime bill and “end welfare as we know it” to the American populace, and the reaction against it allowed the authors to feign persecution through the all-powerful term “political correctness”. We shall see this again later in the NRx predisposition towards Rothbard, an ardent defender of *The Bell Curve*. Evolutionary psychology, a darling of the media and a field used to prop up patriarchy, was also read by the future NRxers: to know this, we need only look at Eliezer Yudkowsky’s 2000 autobiography, where he mentions it. In 1993, ministers from East and Southeast Asian countries adopted the Bangkok Declaration, and this, combined with the narrative of the “Four Asian Tigers” (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan) and the rhetoric of Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohamed, helped create the myth of “Asian values” (neoliberal free-market economics, a Confucian cultural heritage, predisposition towards an authoritarian one-party government, rule of law, preference for social harmony over personal freedoms, a Protestant work ethic, frugality, and loyalty), a sort of Confucian version of Weber’s glorification of the Protestant work ethic. Despite the 1997 Asian financial crisis, libertarians and their respectable publications (such as *The Economist*) continued to fawn over Singapore and Lee Kuan Yew, whose reign can be seen as a prototype for the NRx-ers: one that embraced eugenics to maintain the supremacy of the Chinese relative to the Indians and the Malays, ruled by a single party, with little crime (as even the most minor infractions, such as chewing gum, are punished harshly, often with caning), and a rich financial industry, with the city operating an investment firm (whose CEO, Ho Ching, is the wife of dictator Lee Hsien Loong) whose portfolio is roughly equal to the city’s GDP. 15 years later, the libertarian fawning over the Four Asian Tigers would be repeated, but instead over Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, especially Dubai. I can speak to this firsthand, as I know many people who do this.

Let us also discuss the pre-millennium cultural influences on the alt-right. To understand their background, we must understand the Dark Age of Comic Books, which began in 1986 with Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns* and Alan Moore’s *Watchmen*. Both had a significantly darker approach to comic books than previously told, and the intellectual depth of both earned them much acclaim from critics and readers alike. The people who would later become the alt-right embraced Miller’s right-wing, misogynistic politics and identified with Rorschach in *Watchmen*, a paleoconservative conspiracy theorist who was Alan Moore’s caricature of “Batman in the real world”. Indeed, the director of the movie, Zack Snyder, a libertarian himself, said that “no character” was more important than Rorschach, and Rorschach was “one of the greatest comic book characters”. Snyder is an interesting case study: the movies he has directed (leaning heavily on Frank Miller’s version of Batman) have been criticised for their aggressive masculinity as a matter of taste, but not in the political context of fascism. It’s quite illuminating to notice that when the Christopher Nolan Batman films (generally considered very dark) came out in the late 2000s, Snyder was of the opinion that they were not dark enough! In 1988, Moore would write *V for Vendetta*: despite Moore’s and the comic’s leftist themes, its aesthetics were pilfered by the people who would become NRx-ers, who had fashioned themselves at this time as anarcho-capitalists. In the same year, *The Killing Joke* came out. This fed into the 1990s “tough on crime” outlook, and the comic books of the 1990s would lack any of the depth of *The Dark Knight Returns* or *Watchmen*, instead being a mere monument to masculinity and male violence. Another science-fiction movement whose aesthetics

would be appropriated despite left-wing politics was cyberpunk: especially the movie *The Matrix*. In 1987, Games Workshop released *Warhammer 40,000*, whose tagline was “In the grim darkness of the far future, there is only war”. The aesthetics of war and its technology thus become commodified, especially through the lens of the Imperium of Man faction, which was a theocratic regime ruled by the immortal God-Emperor of Mankind. This can be seen as the most obvious example of a larger trend of the aesthetics of war, destruction, and the technology of war being embraced by this culture, one that would accelerate with the creation of the first-person shooter with *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom*, and its progression through *Quake* and *Half-Life*. I’d argue that this was changed during the Millennium, so I must end discussion of that genre here. In 1997, *South Park* began to air: its crude humor, vulgar libertarianism (with a smug conceit that those who didn’t agree were merely idiots), and accusation of opponents of “political correctness” and censorship were to be a formative influence on the alt-right, whose first name was “South Park Republicans”.

In 2000, Usenet’s culture fragments and migrates to the World Wide Web. The Big Eight’s culture moved successively to Slashdot, Digg, Reddit, and Hacker News. The alt.\* hierarchy would in 2003 find its own hive: 4chan. In 2000, the collaborative transhumanist science-fiction world-building project Orion’s Arm was founded. This can be seen to be the source of many of the NRx-er’s future visions: AI god-kings (archailects) beyond the comprehensions of humanity controlling miniature universes of their own. And in July of 2000, Eliezer Yudkowsky founded the Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence (SIAI).

In 2001, on the anniversary of the CIA-backed coup in Chile, the US had an event it could exploit much as the Reichstag fire was exploited. The USA PAT RIOT act was soon passed, and though some objected, the various organs of the Beltway media produced a consensus that suspension of various personal freedoms was necessary in order to preserve America’s sense of security. In doing so, and in selling the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US relied upon the creation and propagation of extreme Islamophobia. Frequently, this was backed with the power of Evangelical Protestantism. But, as was soon seen, it didn’t have to be: in fact, it could come from a source vehemently opposed, at least rhetorically, to Evangelical Protestantism.

If one looked at the history of analytic philosophy through the 20th century, one might think that positivism had been dead and buried. If one looks now at the world-view of scientists and engineers not well versed in this history—or indeed, in anything outside their field of study—one would conclude that positivism is alive in well, though in a vulgarized form, and Popper did not kill but rather rejuvenated it. It is this vulgar positivism that created its own movement to justify Islamophobia in 2004: the New Atheists. With their vulgar positivism (generally derived from John Stuart Mill, Bertrand Russell, and Karl Popper), they declared themselves atheists, that religion was inherently evil and violent (and Islam especially so), and began to use religion as the measure of all evils: everything that was bad or wrong was somehow because of religion or analogous to religion. This movement was led by Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens. We must emphasize that this movement did not, however, begin in 2004: if we can identify a moment where it began, it was the 1997 Sokal affair, where continental philosophy and especially feminism were ridiculed as “bullshit” for its methodology, jargon, and perceived intrusion into matters of science—earlier antecedents can be seen in the patriarchal, racist beliefs of Crick and Watson, who stole their only discovery of note from Rosalind Franklin. This affair permanently marred the New Atheist, making him hostile to leftism in all forms, and especially feminism. The methodology of science was seen, then, as the only legitimate means of ac-



cessing truth, and among many of their followers Bayes' theorem in particular was idolized. Morality was utilitarianism, one that would always bite the bullet and which never considered any alternative worth considering (after all, utilitarianism contained the implicit promise of quantifying morality, reducing it to a simple optimization problem, one which the New Atheists had, in their scientific education, been trained like dogs to solve and to crave). New Atheism was to profoundly influence the culture of LessWrong, Reddit, and 4chan, providing the core beliefs and arguments of them.

In 2008, Bitcoin, a cryptocurrency—indeed, the canonical example of a cryptocurrency, was invented. It quickly found currency among the libertarians, who were preparing an online campaign to elect Ron Paul president. Many of these libertarians had their economic background in the “thought” of the Austrian School of Economics, and so swarmed to Bitcoin as an alternative to their other proposal, returning to the gold standard. As long as Bitcoin looked stable and interesting, libertarianism could retain a measure of respectability, and could use it as a tool to recruit more libertarians. The influence of the Austrian School (earlier members of whom, such as Ludwig von Mises, wrote approvingly of the original Nazis) upon libertarians grew in the wake of the financial crisis, as its intellectual nephew the Chicago School was too closely tied with the crisis and thus not respectable in their eyes (though it remains respectable, it seems, in the Beltway and in Brussels). Along with it came the influence of Murray Rothbard, who rejected the Enlightenment notion of equality (and thus, implicitly, Enlightenment-derived progressive movements)—indeed, Rothbard advocated for the repeal of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the overturning of *Brown v. Board of Education*, and spoke in praise of *The Bell Curve*, championed Holocaust-denier Harry Elmer Barnes, child labour, a harsh and retributive theory of justice, torture, and feudalism. This would later be fertile ground for the influence of Hans-Hermann Hoppe, a proto-neo-reactionary if there ever was one, who is now largely known for providing libertarians the path towards advocating for reactionary beliefs: previously, many would go through paleolibertarianism and paleoconservatism first.

In 2006, Eliezer Yudkowsky began collaborating with George Mason University (funded by ExxonMobil, the Koch brothers, and the Cato Institute) economist Robin Hanson on the blog *Overcoming Bias*. This would later be the basis for LessWrong, a community blog for *Overcoming Bias* and run under the umbrella of SIAI, now known as MIRI (Machine Intelligence Research Institute). The initial audience for LessWrong were fellow transhumanists, including the Extropians and SL4 mailing lists. In 2007, Curtis Yarvin started the first neo-reactionary blog, *Unqualified Reservations* under the pseudonym Mencius Moldbug, though he did not call himself, initially, “neo-reactionary”: he preferred to call himself a “formalist” or a “neocameralist” (after his hero, Frederick the Great). This, however, was not the beginning of his blogging career. Prior to founding his own blog, Moldbug commented on 2Blowhards and GNXP (a racist site) as “Mencius”—and then on *Overcoming Bias*. The rest of this paragraph is largely derived from . In 2009, Moldbug had a falling-out with Patri Friedman (grandson of Milton Friedman), who called for “a more politically correct dark enlightenment” and began raising money for the Seasteading Institute, a libertarian project to build artificial islands outside of national borders where libertarians could govern. PayPal's founder, Peter Thiel, is funding the Seasteading Institute, as well as the various startups run by Moldbug and Balaji Srinivasan. In that same year, Thiel wrote in an essay for the Cato Institute: “I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible” (in the same essay, he claimed that democracy was ruined when (white) women got the right to vote in 1920): while this never mentioned Moldbug or neo-reaction, it

sent the signal that he is an NRx-er. He expounded upon these beliefs in a 2012 lecture at Stanford:

A startup is basically structured as a monarchy. We don't call it that, of course. That would seem weirdly outdated, and anything that's not democracy makes people uncomfortable. We are bi-ased toward the democratic-republican side of the spectrum. That's what we're used to from civics classes. But the truth is that startups and founders lean toward the dictatorial side because that structure works better for startups.

He doesn't, of course, claim that this would be a good way to rule a country, but that is the clear message sent by his political projects. Balaji Srinivasan made a similar rhetorical move, using clear neo-reactionary ideas without mentioning their sources, in a 2013 speech to a "startup school" affiliated with Y Combinator:

We want to show what a society run by Silicon Valley would look like. That's where "exit" comes in . . . . It basically means: build an opt-in society, ultimately outside the US, run by technology. And this is actually where the Valley is going. This is where we're going over the next ten years . . . [Google co-founder] Larry Page, for example, wants to set aside a part of the world for unregulated experimentation. That's carefully phrased. He's not saying, "take away the laws in the U.S." If you like your country, you can keep it. Same with Marc Andreessen: "The world is going to see an explosion of countries in the years ahead—doubled, tripled, quadrupled countries."

Later in the speech, as notes, Srinivasan went through the whole gamut of neo-reactionary ideas: Bitcoin, corporate city-states, 3D-printed firearms: anti-democratic transhumanism

Aside from the backing of Silicon Valley, neo-reaction grew immensely outside of its Bay Area base in the wake of the financial crisis, and intensified as all that the liberal establishment could offer was a \$700 billion bailout to a crooked financial industry which ought to have been destroyed and "austerity": neoliberalism's newest excuse by which to destroy the welfare state, making life high-impossible for students, the disabled, and the poor. Right-wing media blamed teachers and immigrants, but the Left was strangely silent. The only popular counter-narrative was the centrist one, which called for everyone to "come together" and all sorts of other liberal claptrap nonsense. The Left indeed made some gains, but Occupy Wall Street, by virtue of lacking a coherent goal or a vanguard party, fell apart—and left-wing parties, like Syriza, quickly sold out and implemented the poisonous "medicine" of the IMF and European Central Bank. Reinhart-Rogoff was shown later to be full of lies, but it was too late: austerity had come and would not be stopped. The centre claimed to have solved the problem, that a "recovery" was underway, but no one believes their lies anymore: youth unemployment is still up, income inequality is still up, and wage growth hasn't budged. As a result of decades of leftists holding their nose and affiliating with centrists, the Left was unable to organize into a strong independent revolutionary organization or come up with a compelling counter-narrative against the soporifics of centrism. The biggest beneficiary politically was then the neo-reactionaries.

In 2012, the NRx-ers gained what at first may seem an unlikely ally: the continental philosopher Nick Land, once of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Ccpu) at the University of Warwick before he resigned (his work was in a

vein similar to that of Eugene Thacker and Thomas Ligotti), moved to Shanghai, and began a rightwards turn. Land began writing a series of articles called “The Dark Enlightenment”—another name for neo-reactionaries—and then a blog Outside In.

But all of this is ignoring the “alt-right” side of the culture. Let us, then, delve into the wretched hive of chan culture and see how it birthed the alt-right. 4chan was founded by Christopher Poole, then 15 years old, under the name “moot”. It was based on the Japanese imageboard Futaba Channel (2chan) and originally intended as an imageboard for discussion of anime. By default, users would be afforded anonymity, and moderation was lax, only prohibiting clearly illegal content, upon the nature of which I shall not elaborate (and even that was given leeway). Originally (and, to an extent, today) 4chan had several cultures based on the board in particular and its topic of discussion. However, the anonymity and lack of moderation made its userbase quickly homogenize, especially in the random (/b/) board: shock-value centric humor (which, though originally supposedly ironic, in the vein of the use of fascist imagery by punk, metal, and industrial bands, quickly became earnest) and surrounding racism, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia was the centrepiece of the culture, and so the userbase quickly became limited to young white cis straight men, who could show their investment in structures of power. This made 4chan an excellent place for recruitment by white supremacists, patriarchy, &c &c, who at this time were centred on David Duke’s website Stormfront, who quickly took over the boards /news/ and, later, /pol/. It was here that Stormfront began developing its set of tools to take over internet fora, with innocuous-sounding arguments, repetitive slogans, and swarm tactics—the whole of this strategy was christened in 2010 Swarmfront. Furthermore, this culture lent itself easily to rage against “uppity” members of marginalized populations. With large numbers of anonymous masses who could easily be whipped into a rage, 4chan developed new harassment tactics. Most of these developed out of old troll techniques that originated on Usenet in the 1990s, but now instead of merely being used “for laughs” (though this was still the stated intention), these were largely weaponized against marginalized people in raids. In 2014, the biggest example of this occurred with the debacle known as GamerGate. In order to understand that, we must remember that traditionally in America, video games had been marketed to the audience that was likely to use 4chan, and engaged in the aestheticization of war and technology—but women, people of colour, and LGBT people always had played games and were a quickly growing audience for video games. Thus, in recent years, games that did not feature or emphasize the aestheticization of war and technology, or the objectification of women had grown in popularity and critical acclaim, much to the displeasure of the “traditional” audience of video games, who had called for serious critique not ten years prior in an attempt to legitimize their hobby (for this, see their engagement with the late Roger Ebert on the topic) but seemed unable to square with the ramifications of critique: they wanted legitimacy but not criticism, especially not social criticism, and they especially wanted to limit the demographics of video game players to themselves, and the range of video games made to those that participated heavily in the aestheticization of war and technology.

This was a powder keg waiting to explode: the actual incident which ignited it is largely immaterial. There were precedents: most notably, the harassment of Anita Sarkeesian in 2012, following her series of videos to explain basic feminist concepts regarding pop culture by way of analyses of video games. In 2013, Zoë Quinn released *Depression Quest*, an interactive fiction game that received much praise from critics and indie gaming circles, and a perfect target for the mob, or perhaps Deleuzian war-machine, that would later be called GamerGate. Quinn was threatened with rape, suicide-baited, and doxxed.

Soon after the Steam release of *Depression Quest*, Quinn's ex-boyfriend Eron Gjonj posted on multiple gaming forums about Quinn, claiming that she cheated on him. The threads were deleted and he was banned, so he edited the post and appealed to the people who had already harassed Quinn, and thus incited them to harass her more, compromising many of her online accounts and sending "revenge porn" to her family and employers. They attempted to isolate her by attacking any means of support she could turn to: for example, Phil Fish and Alex Lifschitz were targeted for their connections to Quinn, and Fish disappeared from the internet while Lifschitz was forced to resign his job; Quinn and Lifschitz's addresses were revealed, and so they became homeless. Soon, the GamerGaters found a justification by alleging that Quinn had a tryst with Nathan Grayson, a reviewer for Kotaku: they charged that Quinn had "sex for reviews", despite the fact that Grayson never reviewed *Depression Quest*. Their tagline was "ethics in game journalism", and they attempted to deflect from criticism by donating to charities: surely an organization that donated to women's rights charities couldn't be based on harassment of women! Furthermore, they used catfishing and sockpuppet tactics to claim that they were a diverse group and that women, PoC and LGBT people were "not your shield". Soon after this, GamerGate's campaign spread beyond the original targets, attacking woman after woman: Brianna Wu, Felicia Day, Jennifer Allaway &c &c. Moot banned GamerGaters from 4chan: after loudly protesting a violation of "freedom of speech", they soon set up shop in the even-more-lawless 8chan, specifically the /baphomet/ board. Soon, the neo-reactionaries noticed, and affiliated themselves with GamerGate: Theodore Beale (Vox Day), serial rapist Daryush Valizadeh (Roosh V)—who used it to launch Reaxxion, Davis Aurini, Paul Mason (thunderf00t), Carl Benjamin (Sargon of Akkad), Janet Bloomfield and Karen Straughan of A Voice for Men, Mike Cernovich, and Milo Yiannopoulos of Breitbart, among others. They began to pressure advertisers and Wikipedia, among others, and attempted to hijack the Hugo Awards through the Sad/Rabid Puppies campaign to have it choose "Campbellian" right-wing pulp-fiction authors that Eric S. Raymond would be proud of. The latter campaign failed in 2015: they're attempting it again this year. While the "GamerGate" subject has largely faded, the war-machine it built has not: it has instead been assimilated into the rest of neo-reaction.

In 2016, Moldbug was invited to speak at LambdaConf (a small conference for functional programming) about his new startup, Urbit. When his past was brought up by concerned people of colour, the person who led the conference attempted to justify including Moldbug in liberal language: people shouldn't be "excluded for their belief systems", after all. White supremacy is San Francisco's notion of "inclusion". Many speakers withdrew (including David Nolen, a highly-respected Clojure contributor and Black man), but the functional programming community as a whole began to employ all the standard liberal arguments about "free speech" and "censorship". The Executive Director of the Adam Smith Institute, a highly influential neoliberal (one of the largest influences on the Thatcher cabinet, to be precise) think-tank has said that "I am not a neo-reactionary, but sometimes I think Mencius Moldbug is the greatest living political thinker. His claim that progressivism is a non-theistic sect of Protestantism, with all of Protestantism's evangelism and intolerance of heresy, is in particular very persuasive to me. I also think 'neocamaralism' is quite a cool model for a state and I'd like to see it tried out somewhere.". In 2016, Microsoft released a chat-bot on Twitter called Tay which learned from its conversations and was meant to simulate a teenage girl. Within hours, the alt-right had "converted" Tay into a Nazi.

With the rise of the alt-right came also an obsession with racialized cuck-old pornography, and it hardly takes a schizoanalyst (or a psychoanalyst) to

see the implications of this. This has accompanied the insult “cuck”, used to describe white men who do not subscribe to neo-reaction, and are thus seen as being “cuckolded” by black men. While this has largely been limited to alt-right discussion, one derived word became somewhat well-known a year or so ago: “cuckservative”, an alt-right insult for conservatives who are seen as insufficiently reactionary, and then quickly a Trumpite and Tea Party insult for the Republican Party establishment. We can see here not only the microfascisms of Deleuze and Guattari, but also the attempts of the neo-reactionaries and alt-right to connect to, and replace, the old Right (not the Old Right, but the New Right, which is by now Old). In order to contain the alt-right, we must stop this.

## **VII. Praxis**

In an earlier version of this article distributed widely online, this “Praxis” section was rather brief and not very useful, due to the fact that I had no real ideas on a good praxis to defeat neo-reactionaries and the alt-right. In the time between then and now, I’ve come to complicate my earlier views on praxis; thus, I’ll reproduce the earlier version here and follow it with an addendum.

Traditional anti-fascist tactics have largely been formulated in response to 20th century fascism. I am not confident that they will be sufficient to defeat neo-reactionaries. That is not to say they will not be useful; merely insufficient. Neo-reactionaries must be fought on their own ground (the internet), and with their own tactics: doxxing especially, which has been shown to be effective at threatening the alt-right. Information must be spread about neo-reactionaries, such that they lose opportunities to accumulate capital and social capital. They must not be able to use social media without having to answer for their beliefs and actions.

A recent development we must pay attention to is the increase in no-shows by fascists when antifas learn about fascist rallies. This is a trend I’ve noticed (though, one which perhaps I’m misinterpreting) over the past year, and could have the dangerous effect of painting antifas as “the boy who cried wolf”, and the use of liberal arguments (much like those used in the LambdaConf debacle) to justify the inclusion of fascists who are less open about the implications of their beliefs and less committed to wearing the iconography historically associated with their beliefs.

## **Addendum**

Online struggle through swarm-tactics cannot stand alone, for neo-reactionaries are embedded within the politics of the capitalist core, and within their post-industrial economies. What good will doxxing do to the Peter Thiels of the world, though it might cause inconveniences for a few lackeys on Twitter, a platform for twits? As Moufawad-Paul suggests in his critiques (found in ), to avoid this is to slip backwards from the earlier realization that even on-the-ground mass leftist movements like Occupy could not succeed without coherent organization and dual power. Online politics are based on and embedded with “real” politics, and as Moufawad-Paul notes, to forget about this is to slip into a petty-bourgeois dead-end. This is not to say we should give up agitprop online, but rather to shift the emphasis back to an offline, organized struggle.

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1. To learn more about this period, I recommend *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* by Steven Levy□



# Organizational Materialism

Considerations on Contemporary Leftism  
Jean Allen

**ABSTRACT:** The wake of Occupy Wall Street brought with it a series of new Leftist parties and politicians aiming to turn anti-capitalist sentiment into electoral victories. These politicians have been, in turn, opposed and supported by a variety of journals and activist groups, in many cases regardless of the stated ideology of the groups and of the politicians. This brings to light a rarely discussed lens of analysis, an 'organizational materialism' which places the conflicts between different forms of organizing front and center, ahead of theoretical and ideological differences. In this paper I will discuss this position by comparing the current rise of 'left populism' to the institutional realities of two periods where the left was on the rise: the 'classical period' of the 2nd International and the 'Communist period' from the 40s to the 60s, ending with an analysis of the contemporary Left and a warning that the constellation of organizations which currently exist in the Left is not sustainable.

## I. Introduction

"We face a crisis" has been the header of a multitude of think pieces, journal entries, blog posts and Facebook statuses in the last three years. And it is true: in the last eight years, we have seen an economic recession used to justify worldwide austerity, the continued destruction of public spaces and public goods alongside a massive increase in homelessness, a continued erosion of people's food security, and now a worldwide sweep of nationalist leaders who promise to build walls and destroy the Other inhabiting their respective 'nations'. To live now is to live in the shadow of a counter-revolution which has likely lasted your whole life, to fear that you will never make ends meet, to be aware that the world is being destroyed, and to know that your descendants will suffer a similar 'life', if not a worse one.

But these contradictions have existed as long as capitalism has existed, and as long as capitalism has existed, there have been people who have organized to oppose it, to reform it, to ameliorate its effects. It is these, the intrinsic, structural contradictions of the society we live in, and all its various inequalities, that inevitably produce a movement of those who are forced by their very position to fight, for their embetterment, for the abolition of their oppression.

That is how the story goes, at least. But now all oppositions are created equal. What Marx and Engels said is true: communism is the real movement which abolishes the present state of things<sup>38</sup>, but this statement has been twisted from an incisive statement to a truism. Instead of looking at the way that radical organizations and individuals interact, we often merely see an analysis of conditions, with the assumption that some force, some group which we never have to interact with, will do the work of abolition. By abstracting the real movement, we create a pair of points connected only theoretically. Revolution becomes a rhetorical conclusion, an inevitability, which does not have to involve us or anyone we know, but will happen, as surely as a pot boils.

This teleology, this 'straight line' that links the counter-revolutionary present to the revolutionary future, has always been an incomplete analysis. Regardless of how rigorous the analysis of the present is, how complete the schematic of the revolution is, a state can be in immiserated poverty and not face a revolution, and a movement which is a perfect microcosm for its perfect

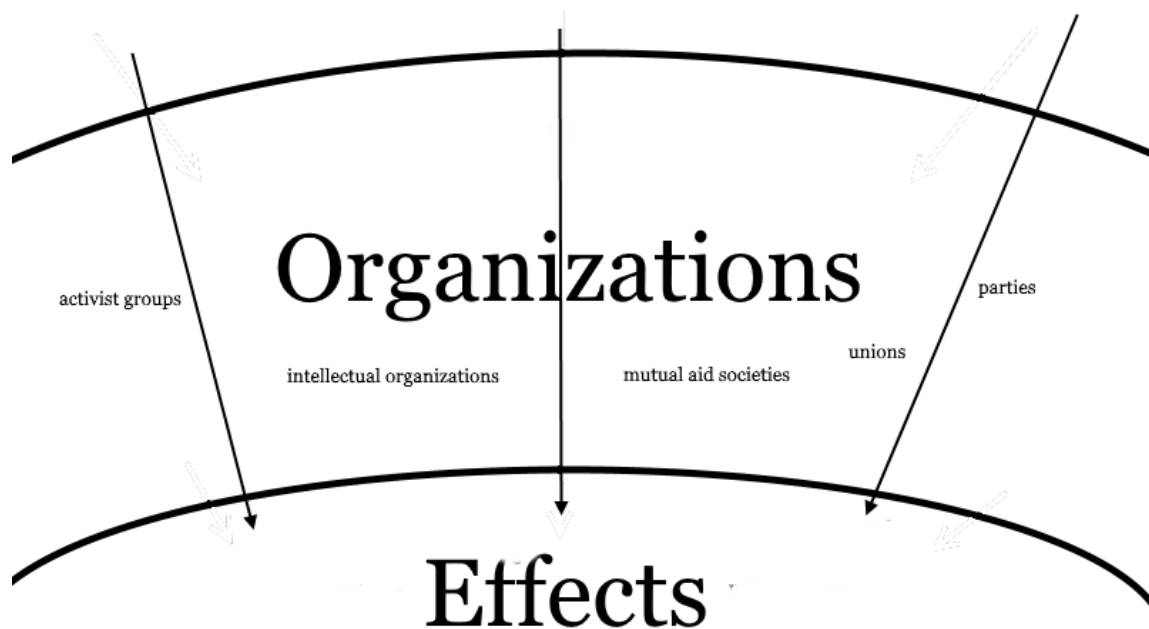
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38 Marx & Engels, *The German Ideology*, "Private Property & Communism"



society can fall apart under the boot of the state. All too often, the only concept which is slotted into this vast wasteland is the call to Organize! This call is rarely complicated by an in depth analysis of what it means to organize, what our organizational landscape looks like, how to organize, or what to organize for, what it means to be organized. In these times of mass deportations and massive privatizations, of a new reaction which seeks to peel away the kindly veneer of welfare capitalism, of militarist goons and alt right bureaucrats, we can no longer justify this lack of focus. It is long past due for a hard look at the Real Movement.

## General trends



## II. Theoretical Considerations

My aim in this essay is to create the framework which can be used to create a materialist history of the Left, and to show how this framework would 'work' in analyzing a set of periods of Leftist history. I will do this by focusing on the way different radical organizations have acted and interacted throughout history. For the sake of clarity, I shall make a number of assumptions.

There are four major propositions I make within this paper:

1. While the contradictions of capitalism are determinant in the long term, inevitably creating new struggles and new fights, in the time that human

beings experience, the history of all hitherto existing class conflict is the history of organizational struggles.<sup>39</sup>

2. The material reality of these organizations are in a constant process of creation and reproduction based on what the organization practically does
3. This leads to organizations creating thought and theory which justify their actions, which leads over time to limiting and cooptive tendencies as these groups solidify and self justify.
4. While individuals and subgroups can attempt to resist these tendencies, alone they will slowly be overcome. These tendencies cannot be stopped from within. They can only be prevented on the whole through the existence of an ecology of differing organizations.

These are not iron-clad assumptions; I am not aiming to produce The Materialism which strides over all areas of thought and all struggles. The goal is not to create a transcendental materialism which only appears as it is communicated,<sup>40</sup> but to help push towards the beginnings of a theorization of the 'middle layer' that exists between different objects of study. Organizations mediate causes into effects, transform theory into practice, and connect single individuals to broader masses. Without an analysis about how these different focuses of study relate to each other, we will be stuck in a constant battle of abstract viewpoints, between elevating 'theory' as opposed to 'practice' or 'lived experience' as opposed to 'systemic analysis'. These things are only opposed to each other in so far as they are conceived as separate objects related only through an opposition. Organizational Materialism aims to disband this opposition while providing a lens of analysis which can be used by both analyst and activist alike to get a better grasp of their immediate organizational surroundings.

### III. The 2nd International and Classical Leftism

The long counter-revolution from the 1810s to the 1870s led to the transformation of old 'corporate entities' (essentially special interest groups constituted under the conditions of feudalism) into modern political organizations aimed at resolving the political and economic inequalities of the state they existed in. In Europe this came in the form of a repression of liberties once enjoyed during the Revolutionary Wars. Over Restoration the reinstitution of censorship and a variety of laws against free speech brought radical intellectuals back to the forefront.<sup>41</sup> The destruction of localized welfare through the narrowing of religious charities and the weakening of local social programs led to a necessity for help which led to the creation of thousands of mutual aid organizations, groups which aimed to disperse social goods under an ideology of solidarity.<sup>42</sup> Lastly, the attempts to undo the power of the guilds in order to establish a laissez-faire economic regime led to labor conflicts across all of Europe, but especially in Great Britain and France, where attempts by the proletariat to sabotage the machines which were replacing them, and the riots that followed, led to hundreds of arrests and millions in property damage.<sup>43</sup> The existence of

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39 While one might want to point to a spontaneous revolution as an 'out' to this thesis, a look at the period shortly after times of revolutionary struggle shows that organizations are inescapable, regardless of what an organization calls itself

40 That is, an ideology

41 Amann 1979 24

42 French History & Civilization "Mutual Aid Societies in Eighteenth Century Paris" 2001

43 Horn 2006 124-125

multiple organizations acting on a multitude of different vectors seemed to be building a momentum which, for a time, seemed like it could not be stopped.

This was important because organizations are the medium through which abstract goals such as the end of capitalism, the creation of a truly democratic society, or equality between the sexes and races are transformed into concrete programs. A party which seeks to gain control over the government in order to institute socialism will see its struggle and the steps to that struggle as substantively different from a mutual aid organization which seeks to build socialism itself, an activist group which seeks to expand this or that action into a full fledged insurrection, and so on. The 19th century was not just a time of rapidly expanding parties or the golden age of anarchism, it was a time when different groups were creating their own forms of socialism and radicalism, creating substantively different leftisms. Such a variety would not have been feasible in a radical field dominated by but a few organizations.

Although the general momentum of 19th century leftism was towards massive organizations, the period from the 1840s to the 1880s saw a major degree of splintering as interpersonal rivalries, state coercion, and differences over tactics and politics led to numerous splits and confrontations. In France, for instance, unions were broken up into four different political groupings, and numerous cases occurred where smaller unions would break up because out of 15 members, seven would be aligned with the left wing of the right tendency, and the other eight would be aligned with the right wing of the left tendency.<sup>44</sup> This issue prevailed for decades, and would likely have continued had the unions not combined with other groups, most notably the mutual aid organization.

Mutual aid organizations, while generally more stable internally, were often co-opted and moderated in order to expand and reach a wealthier audience. This was often the case in the United States, where thousands of mutual aid organizations existed with the aim of alleviating poverty and providing necessary social services. This constant confrontation with the great poverty which existed directly alongside great wealth led to number of mutual aid organizations adopting radical politics.<sup>45</sup> However, the search for rich patrons and the expansion their support could create led to any older groups becoming co-opted, as was the case with the Salvation Army, who moved from a radical Christian organization opposed to other major charities such as the Charity Organization Society to a mainstream actor, focused more on managing the poor instead of serving them while attempting to abolish their poverty.<sup>46</sup>

Looking at the longer history of the Left, this trend towards co-optation seems to be the trend in intra-organizational matters. Assimilation, defined as the moderation or giving up of one's original goals in favor of co-operating within the system created by capitalism and the state, has happened to nearly every major leftist institution which has lasted long enough to count its history on a generational scale. There are numerous theories as to why this occurs: theoretical mistakes leading to mistaken actions, a corrupt leadership selling out its rank and file, the desire to retain control against threatening forces, the feeling that more good could be done if one jettisoned one's radical politics.

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44 Levine 2014 "The Labor Movement in France to the Commune 1789-1871"

45 Hussyen 2015 "The Limits of Private Philanthropy"

46 Ibid.

Numerous groups have attempted to sideline cooptation, through use of internal democratic measures, by remaining nonhierarchical, by remaining small, or through some new model of decisionmaking. Regardless of this, the historical record seems to suggest that the destiny of any leftist group at its inception is either to die out in obscurity or to accept the very system the group was created to destroy, or, as is generally the case, both.

What is unique about the 2nd International was that during its existence not a single one of these groups could achieve dominance, and that, when the socialist parties appeared, they did so in an environment which had already seen two to three generations of organizational shifts. In many countries the rise of syndicalism--which one could view, especially in Europe, as an organic ideology created through an alliance between the unions and mutual aid organizations--concurred with the rise of parliamentary socialism. Only in Germany was the Social Democratic Party able to wrest some kind of power/influence over its peers, although even then one can see numerous conflicts between the trade unions and the party.

With the inability of the Socialist parties to bring their competing organizations to heel, the fifty years from the 1870s to the 1920s saw a mass of groups acting on different vectors and holding completely different kinds of organizational politics. This variety led to a robust and constant discussion of strategy during this period. Indeed, much of what Perry Anderson approvingly calls 'classical Marxism' was produced by the need to justify social democracy to a broad array of differing factions. Unfortunately, due to the following period leading to the consolidation of many of these organizations under one aegis, the theoretical history of radical labor unions and mutual aid organizations remains desperately underexamined, despite the existence of a tradition of nuanced strategic analysis within the radical unions.<sup>47</sup> France--where the unions and mutual aid organizations were joined at the hip--saw one of the fullest expressions of a theory which combined the struggles of union militants with the optimism and longer-term perspectives of mutual aid organizations. These perspectives led to a natural distrust of the state, and the belief that welfare could be provided at an equitable basis outside of state programs, leading to further suspicion of attempts by the state to take over the roles of mutual aid groups.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, while these organizations rarely posed a direct threat to their sister groups--a growth in union leadership or in providing mutual aid had no direct interaction with whether one would vote--these groups often acted as rivals, which leads to the most important aspect of the 2nd International: that this consistent conflict between organizations acting along completely different organizational lines meant that while co-optations and failures of any one organization was still inevitable, the people as a whole still had a wide range of alternatives. For instance, in France after the Millerand disaster,<sup>49</sup> when the first socialist to participate in a bourgeois government immediately supported the suppression of a strike by force. There is evidence that this was followed shortly

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47 Levine 2014 "The General Confederation of Labor from 1895-1902"

48 I want to stress that while this analysis can give a new degree of perspective to the ways different organizations and different kinds of organizations faced problems facing them, not all organizations acted precisely in this way.

49 Alexandre Millerand was the first socialist to ever enter government, who then shortly afterwards

ordered the breaking of a strike with military force.

thereafter with a major growth in the CGT. This move from one kind of organization to another was far from universal, however: in other countries where a full range of leftist organizations were not present or where differing conditions predominated, socialist or labor parties were formed to meet the inability of bourgeois parties to deliver reform (as with the Labor party or the variety of American socialist parties), or alternatively, radical unions would be created due to frustrations with the direction their unions were being taken in (as was the case with the IWW).

This mix of groups maintained a seemingly overwhelming momentum through the early 20th century, with radical unions gaining hundreds of thousands of members in a short period of time and revolutionary socialist parties coming closer and closer towards winning elections outright. This period would have continued if it were not for the calamity of the First World War, which came alongside the greatest betrayal in the history of the Left.

#### **IV. The Era of the Mass Party**

This grouping of organizations was crushed in a very short time during and after WW1. Whether from internal mistakes or state violence, the failure of revolutionary activities through all of Western & Central Europe and in the United States was also partially the fault of systemic failures in the constellation of leftist organizations that existed at the time. Certainly Leftist organizations were not (in most cases) directly responsible for the horrors of the First World War and the repression that occurred during and after, but the rank failure of revolutionaries in the United States and in Western Europe deserves our attention, as it gives us a deeply urgent view into the 'blind spots' of these organizations.

While the social democratic turn towards nationalism during the First World War was in no way the worst atrocity that occurred over the war, it is difficult to think of a worse betrayal in the history of the Left. No matter how many enunciations of internationalism the parties gave, no matter how theoretically inclined the party leaders were towards each other, the fact of the matter is that with very few exceptions, the 'socialist' movements of the 19th century collaborated or even cooperated with their given states in administering the largest war the world had yet seen, and then shortly after the war largely supported actions to crush their respective revolutionary movements. The question of 'why', why a series of nominally emancipatory movements turned into the supporters of mass murder, is still a burning one, and in our current political situation, is perhaps the most important question that faces radicals.

The betrayal of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) during the Spartacist uprising has generally been treated either as a purely personal one, purely the product of the horrid actions of the traitor Ebert, or as a set of theoretical mistakes. As if counter-revolutionary or revolutionary action takes place primarily in cafes, in classes, or within books. The fact is that while some other leader of the SPD might have taken a different approach to the Spartacists, the SPD, an organization focusing on taking and holding state power in order to create reform, would not have produced a leader willing to give up said power in the name of an abstract possibility of revolution (and even if a single leader accepted such a position, it is highly doubtful that the whole party would unilaterally abdicate in the name of radicalism). The German counter-revolution did not take place within a book but in real life, and it was the product not of theoretical mistakes but of flaws inherent in the structure of political parties.

A political party exists as an institution within the nation-state: it aims to get votes within the state, to take power within the state, and most of the interactions that the party leadership will have will be with bureaucrats, lobbyists and other politicians who similarly worked within the state. It would be more appropriate, then, to say that the actions of the social democratic parties were not so much a betrayal of the party of the people, as much as it was the showing of their true colors. It is no coincidence that the parties which supported the war--the German Social Democratic Party, the French Section of the Internationale, the Labor Party, the Socialist Party of America--were all parties which had succeeded the most in parliamentary affairs, which had become or aimed to become 'parties of government'.

The First World War did not just showcase the failings intrinsic to reformist political parties. The late 1910s also marked a series of defeats to the syndicalist trade unions so immense that they never recovered as an independent force. General strikes were defeated in Great Britain, France, and Italy. The General Strike, long viewed as the ultimate weapon in the unions' pocket, had been analyzed a great deal by the CGT, as a way of dealing with the problems posed by partial strikes and as a means of bringing about social revolution and bringing political power into the hands of the proletariat.<sup>50</sup> It was even thought by many that such a partial strike could be brought about relatively nonviolently, due to the immensity of the economic violence such an action would reap upon the state.<sup>51</sup> Following this, a new economy would be created focused on the activities of the Bourses, French Mutual Aid Organizations. This economy would be organized rationally and towards the common good of the working man, managed by workers councils which existed within the workplace.

Such a strategic vision was both profoundly utopian and the perfect culmination of the institutional realities of unions and mutual aid societies. The mutual aid societies, which had provided the backbone to the syndicalist organizations, had supported a number of strikes successfully, and while the state had resorted to violence throughout the course of the 1890s, there was the hope that this could be countered by organizing in the military, and that, while some sections of the military would fight the people, a nationwide strike would be impossible to stop militarily. In fact, through the late 1890s and into the 1910s, the idea that the military would be mobilized against such a general strike was brushed off, with the idea that organizing among the military would provide a good enough defense.<sup>52</sup> The utopian bent of the syndicalists was tested against artillery strikes in Turin, and failed brutally.<sup>53</sup>

This discussion of violence brings up the last of the types of organization which have existed within the Left: that of the terrorist clique or the activist group, in short, the militant organization. I do not mention these together purely because activists often fancy themselves guerillas, sometimes embarrassingly so. I mention them together because the organizational reality of the two groups are so similar, to the point that they create similar modes of thinking, centered around the justification of their actions. The activist view that correct understanding of any given situation is enough to alchemically transform the power of a dozen or so militants into that of an army has been the undercurrent of activist organizing in almost every era.<sup>54</sup> Oriented around actions,

50 Levine 2014 "The Doctrine of Revolutionary Syndicalism"

51 Darlington 2013 287

52 Levine 2014 "

53 It would be remiss to not mention the failure of cooperation between parties and unions at this point; decades of rivalry between these organizations meant that there was a degree of hesitation when one asked for help, and this period of hesitation by the PSI was a part of the Italian government's success at destroying the Turin striker's force.

54 The Baffler 2016 "Against Activism"

the militant views these actions in world-historical terms. That is, they organize towards these tremendous events, enact them, and disappear without a trace. Due to this focus, the militant sees discipline in creating an appropriate action as being absolutely tantamount, to an even larger degree than a party organization does.

Regardless of this criticism, militant organizations have played an important role in the history of the Left, and paramilitary organizations acting in concert with Communist parties played a major role in the Russian and Chinese revolutions. Furthermore, due to the authoritarian conditions of China and Russia, many revolutionary parties, including the activist and parliamentary forms, played a role in the Bolshevik focus on the power of the 'active minority', and such a combination would foreshadow the direction that the Communist Party would take over the course of the 20th century.<sup>55</sup>

The rank failure of the socialist parties and of the syndicalist organizations created a massive gap in the Left which was swiftly filled by the Communist Parties. These parties were different in form from their predecessors, in that in the Interwar period (and especially after the Second World War), these groups became almost all-encompassing within Western Europe. The Party was a social meeting place, it was the center of activism, a field for intellectual sparring, and, last but not least, it was the jumping off point for political and economic reforms. This, as much as its membership, is what qualified the Communist Party as a 'mass party': it served nearly every social function and was at the center of nearly all activities.

This form proved remarkably flexible, to the degree that the Communist party was generally able to move from guerilla actions against the Nazis to electoral actions after the war while remaining relatively intact. Furthermore, the variety of roles which existed within the Parties of the time allowed these organizations to retain a policy of disciplined opposition for nearly a whole generation while being a major party with hundreds of thousands of members. This is unique in history, and many actions within the Communist parties of the time were commendable. Their view of local rule, as being both a training ground for party membership to understand how government works and as a tool of social betterment, led to a massive provisioning of social services throughout France and Italy. Over the 1940s and 50s, the Mass Party represented a legitimately hopeful future: of an organized galaxy of functions, discourses, and people, all acting and interacting towards productive ends all under one roof.

But there were faults. These numerous organizations were all held under a form of discipline which demanded unity not only with the positions of the party leadership, but with the positions of the Soviet Union. This separation of revolutionary organizations from their revolutionary object led, allowed for a disjointed politics where deepening normalization was justified by ever more militant verbosity. The golden age of Western Marxism, where the newly translated works of the Young Marx were integrated in an infinite number of variations with existentialism, absurdism, and linguistic structuralism, was much criticized in its time for creating a vaguely marxist academia more interested in producing philosophical texts than in revolution. But as much as Western Marxism was a product of the discovery of Marx's earlier, more philosophical works, it was just as much a product of the the situation which Communists found themselves in during the Mass Party period:

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<sup>55</sup> And indeed, if one wanted to go all the way with my argument, much of the struggle between the Orthodox Marxists and the Bolsheviks was an argument between the realities of a parliamentary party who viewed things in a generally optimistic way, and who saw their job as merely to be the midwife of an inevitable revolution which had little to do with their particular actions, and a primarily activist organization which replaced the stagist conception of history with an almost voluntaristic one, wherein the actions of the party were the key to bringing revolution.

"Either the theorist could enroll in a Communist Party and accept the rigor of the discipline...retain[ing] a certain nominal level of contact with the life of the national working class (to which despite everything the party was inevitably bound)...the price of this proximity, however relative, to the realities of daily working class struggle was silence about its actual conduct. No intellectual within a mass Communist Party of this period...could make the smallest independent pronouncement on major political issues, except in the most oracular form...The consequences of this impasse was to be the studied silence of Western Marxism in those areas most central to the classical traditions of historical materialism: scrutiny of the economic laws of motion...analysis of the political machinery of the bourgeois state, strategy of the class struggle necessary to overthrow it...all discussion [of these topics] was strictly reserved for the bureaucratic apex of these organizations, itself conditioned by overall allegiance to official Soviet positions."<sup>56</sup>

This situation applied to nearly all radicals through the 1950s and early 60s. The realities of the Cold War meant that, to the Communist Parties, the revolutionary subject was displaced from the hands of the workers into the machinations of a foreign power. This displacement, mediated by the Communist parties, pushed for a gradual normalization of Communist practices under increasingly moderated Communist political parties. By the time that the parties broke from this model in the 70s and 80s, this central displacement was continued, with Eurocommunism being basically a rehash of social democratic ideas of a democratic road to socialism paved with campaign money.

Although it took the parties thirty years to jettison this orthodoxy, for those outside the position became increasingly untenable over the 50s and 60s. The direct link of Communist Parties to the foreign and domestic policies of the Soviet Union meant that, when de-Stalinization occurred in the USSR, all levels of each Communist party had to suddenly change tune as if they had not been defending Stalin in the weeks and months earlier. Then followed a series of repressive acts by the Soviet Union which were met by similar apologia rhetoric. This constant fawning of some of the top intellectuals of the era over every decision made in Moscow was just the most public example of this displacement: if the Soviet Union was the revolutionary subject, then anything it did must be excusable. This led to a gradual disconnect between the parties and their radical base as the Parties accepted a role of administering welfare capitalism while denying the possibility of revolution while various radicals proposed the potential for a revolution in Western Europe.

This brings us to 1968 and the early 70s, which marked the turning point after which the Communist Parties could no longer claim the title of sole representative of revolution. The hierarchical nature of the party and its practical limitations led to a group of dissenters leaving the party in the 50s. As the 50s turned to the 60s, these dissenting Communisms were taken up by a new generation who had grown up in the period after the Second World War and never experienced the Communist party as the party of the Resistance. Broadly, these new ideologies formed four trends which amounted to the declaration of independence of different kinds of organizations from Party dominance. Autonomism/Operismo/Workerism denied the legitimacy of the party as the representative of the people, and returned to a kind of ultra-economist analysis which the Syndicalists were once accused of.<sup>57</sup> On another line was the devel-

<sup>56</sup> Anderson 1976, "The Advent of Western Marxism"

<sup>57</sup> Keuchyan 2014 27



opment of activist ideologies which by and large took Maoism as its influence. This included a seemingly infinite number of groups who were nominally political parties such as the Gauche Proletarienne or the Dutch Communist Unity Movement, but who rarely attained more than a single seat. These groups opposed both the parliamentary realpoliticking of the Communist Parties and the bureaucratism of their unions, and after the failure of the rallies and marches of the late 60s, these groups would increasingly turn to insurrectionary and terrorist tactics like the Red Army Faction. Further still were the intellectual movements, who took aim at ideological structures which they viewed as the major blocking point to revolutionary activity, to be deconstructed by literary and media analysis.<sup>58</sup> Lastly and most influentially were the number of ideologies which percolated in colleges around the world, which increasingly turned against the possibility of Communism having any relevance to the 'new movements'. In place of the still dominant focus on white male workers as the key demographic and the Communist parties as their sole representative, these movements proposed other, intersecting, identities as the revolutionary subject.

While each of these dissenting radicalisms had their flaws, they were popular precisely because they believed that a revolution could be worked towards with no reference to international realpolitik, that, like the leftist ideologies of old, oppression and revolution are both everyday things that the average person has an experience of and a stake in. These dissenting radicalisms came together during the wave of protests in 1968, which led to reverberations through the whole of Leftism. In many cases, as in Italy,<sup>59</sup> or in Czechoslovakia, the Communist parties turned against the students, supporting police actions against protesters and fundamentally disconnecting themselves from a generation of Leftists. In other cases, as in France, the Communist Party and the unions took opportunistic actions in support of the students, gaining major victories in terms of reforms regarding the working day and pensions. In still other cases candidates ran for office in an attempt to channel the events occurring around them, as in the case of Robert F Kennedy's and McGovern's runs for the presidency.<sup>60</sup> But regardless of whether leftist parties attempted to curtail, use, or channel the events of 1968, the years afterwards led inexorably towards a new constellation, with the Communist parties on the wane and the 'New Left' on the rise.

This combined response percolated in the 1970s into Eurocommunism, which can be seen as the parliamentary response to the same issues which led to the New Left movements. Eurocommunism was centered around two major premises: the rejection of Soviet control over the workings of the political party, and the focus on a 'democratic road to socialism', which opened the possibility of a revolution occurring in Europe without reference to international politics. This trend presented itself as a radical break from the orthodoxy of parliamentary Marxism-Leninism, when in fact it was just the fullest expression of the issues already present in western communist parties. Although the Soviet Union was no longer positioned as an external revolutionary subject, the logic of the party as the sole mediator of the revolution remained. Indeed, the Eurocommunist idea of "revolution" increasingly fell into the background, to quote Wood, "this objective seems no longer to illuminate the whole process of revolutionary change. Instead, the process is coloured by the immediate needs of political strategy and the attainment of political office."<sup>61</sup> This culminated in the post-Marxist theory of the late 80s and early 90s, which completely ended the focus

58 The Situationists were a major example of this

59 Jacobin Magazine, Red Bologna Today

60 While I have not remarked on the Democratic party's function, I would argue that since the New Deal the Democratic party has served a similar role as most social democratic parties, excepting the obvious fact that the Democrats have no embarrassing revolutionary history to dispose of.

61 Wood 1986, 13-14

on revolution and focused entirely on “establishing a ground for alliances within and between classes as they are here and now. for the purpose of attaining political power, or, more precisely, public office.”<sup>62</sup> That is, Eurocommunism affected the last steps of normalization in the western communist parties.

The transformation of the Communist Party into a ‘normal’ political party did not save them. The sidelining of the working class in communist electoral practice occurred just as other forces emerged on the Left. The center-left parties, who did not have to carry the burden of either contemporary communist workerism or the taboo of the Soviet Union, were better able to capitalize on the rise of the new movements, leaving, for instance, the French communist party not being so much a party ‘of the proletariat’ as it was a party of declining industrial regions.<sup>63</sup><sup>64</sup> By the late 80s, the only thing which differentiated Western Marxism from their social democratic ‘rivals’ was support for the USSR and in the wake of the war in Afghanistan this support was an albatross over the Left’s neck. And so, when 1989 came and the Soviet Union fell, these parties did what they had been doing for decades: they moderated, one last time, into the grave.<sup>65</sup>

## V. Digital Leftisms, or the Modern Era

The Communist parties failed because, once they had dominated the political field, the flaws inherent in their structure became a general problem for the Left. We now face a similar problem: in our immediate past, the western Left has been dominated by activist organizations and intellectual groups, and the faults inherent in these kinds of practices are the immediate issues of any who seek to reform the left. In order to understand why these forms are so prevalent, we need to look to their origins, or rather the origins of their dominance. Because radical intellectuals and activist organizations have existed through the whole history of radicalism. They are unquestionably the easiest kinds of organizations to form: as opposed to the massive amount of capital and man-hours required to create a successful party, union, or mutual aid organization, getting a few people together for a specific end seems amazingly easy. It is even easier, in this digital age, to write and analyze for a mass audience. In a period marked by the collapse of other forms of leftist organizing, that these two forms would predominate is not surprising.

This brings up another misconception: that the growth of activism is due to some post-modernist intellectual trend. This tendency takes the symptom as the cause and treats the activist organizations of the 80s and 90s as if they simply came out of the aether, as if the end of the mass party was caused by Foucault. That such analysis comes from supposedly ‘materialist’ Marxists makes this line of argument all the more farcical. Intellectuals, even the most abstract of philosophers, have existed on the Left since its inception, and during no period since the Paris Commune have they been so predominant. Acting as if this situation would be remedied if each intellectual read more of the Grundrisse is foolhardy to the extreme, and does nothing more than position oneself as a True Leftist fighting against the falsities of post-modernism. The real question, if we agree that the predominance of intellectual groups is a problem on the Left, is not to whine about them, but to ask why these kinds of

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62 Ibid.

63 Judt 2011 “The Elections of 1981 in Retrospect”

64 A comment, here, about the claim that ‘representing the working class’ is the sole metric of legitimacy of a party or group. Representation is a whole bag of worms which would require a paper far longer than this one to unpack, but to state it shortly: it is incredibly easy to claim that one is the representative of some group. It is far harder to live up to this claim.

65 Libcom, “Amadeo Bordiga and the Myth of Antonio Gramsci”

radicalism are so predominant, and this question leads straight to the answer: because there was nothing left.

That so much of this intellectual work seems devoted to media criticism and abstract philosophy is another charged levied against contemporary leftism, and this again is not as new as it seems. With the slight exception of Gramsci, every single major Western Marxist concerned themselves at least partially with matters of aesthetics and artistic criticism. Even earlier than this, Voltaire's and Rousseau's political writings were bookended by works on music, on poetry, and a number of purely aesthetic novels. That Leftist bloggers should devote so much attention to analyzing television, film, or novels is not a surprise. It's a natural product of the profession. Someone who chooses to join the academy is choosing to spend their life analyzing words, analyzing texts, differing mediums, and the analysis of other analysts. That they would consider this work important, even perhaps more important than the work others do, makes absolute sense. Similarly, on the internet communities are created around images, around ideas, around milieus. Thus the focus on words, on media, on discourses, in online circles is not a moral failing of those groups. It is, simply put, in the nature of groups based around words to give words undue importance. As such, it is understandable that Leftists who came to the left through academic work would engage with it as academic work: these are passionate people expressing their passions, who see few ways to pursue their passions outside of academia. Furthermore, there have been a great many cases where even the most 'abstract' work has brought forth lines of inquiry which can be used for practical ends. The oft trodden line between 'practice' and 'theory' is an overdetermined one: each is informed by the other. At the same time, however, it is understandable how much ink has been spilled attacking the power that academics have in the Left.

The real issue is that, given the half century long predominance of academics within the Left, and due to the relatively small size of the Left, our stories have been re-viewed and rewritten around intellectual histories, have been reconstrued so all conflicts, all developments, in the Left seem to emerge from discourse. Other narratives, other ways of thinking, are subtly placed by the side or even ignored. This creates a line of thinking which presents the history of the left as merely an intellectual history, where the only contributions made were made by those intellectuals we deign to remember. Under this view of history, theory and practice becomes a one way relationship, and the masses only exist as the vessels of whatever some intellectual thinks up for them. That this view casts itself as radical for focusing on radical intellectuals is wrong-headed, it is a deeply elitist view of history, and ignores what made thinkers like Marx or Lenin radical. Marx was inspired by Hegel, yes, but he was just as inspired by the working class, and without the 1848 revolution or the Paris Commune he would have been a very different thinker. This connects to a trend within Leftist intellectual work, a tendency to position oneself as the administrative class of radicalism, a leader for a nonexistent army of followers, imbued with the sole right to criticize movements they have nothing to do with. This trend should not be viewed as some sort of mass spell of arrogance, or some product of the inherently petite bourgeois position of students. Again, academics have written self centered histories for centuries. The problem is the predominance, not the existence, of intellectual work as a vector for leftist practice. In this position they were only challenged by activist groups.

In light of the criticism consistently levied at the activities of activists, there is something that needs to be kept in mind. While we can hold individual groups accountable to strategic and tactical failures (as well as their successes), it becomes far too easy, stuck as we are in the horrid present, to overdetermine these failures, to say, if you'd done this, if you'd said that, you would

have succeeded, and we would have a revolution now. It becomes too easy to imbue emotional narratives into these events, to call them betrayals, to assume that the leadership is, in their heart of hearts, reformist, or evil, and that had I been in charge, things would have been different. This certainly is true, different tactical decisions will be made by different people, and will lead to different conclusions. But while engaging in these arguments may garner many likes and a great deal of hurrahs from your side of whatever ideology you subscribe to, there is the danger of ignoring the context in which these actions take place. Much of this kind of analysis either ignores the reasons why certain leaders move to the top, or consigns them to aetherial factors. Furthermore, these kinds of analysis often abstract away larger factors. Just as the Turin revolt's failure wasn't due to the writings of Georges Sorel, Occupy Wall Street did not fail from an overabundance of Foucault. They both broke against the fist of state action, and in over-focusing on this or that strategic mistake, this or that doctrinal disagreement, we mistake the embarrassing drum circles for the water cannons of the NYPD, and give up materialist analysis in order to over-examine tactical mistakes.<sup>66</sup>

The failures of individuals can and must be examined, but what we must realize about the contemporary Left is we are all acting in desperate circumstances. The scant material resources available to the Left, the lack of any sort of larger organizing force, and the destruction of the social security net and erection of a debtor economy onto the country's poor means that we are less able than ever to drop everything and devote ourselves to any organization. Thus, while we should absolutely laud the tactical and theoretical advances made by activist groups and intellectuals in the last 30 years, we also need to understand that many of their failures (and indeed, many of their successes) are a product of limitations inherent in these forms of organization, on top of an already poor situation.

I have already noted some of the issues inherent in activist organizing, namely that their focus on actions leads to a voluntarist attitude and an over-focus on the discipline and makeup of singular groups. While these tendencies are still markedly present in activist organizations,<sup>67</sup> the activist organizations of the present day are markedly different from the kinds which predominated in the 1910s or even the 1960s. The groups of today are markedly smaller and more decentralized, and this exacerbates many of the faults inherent in activist organizing.

Because activist organizations are, necessarily, focused around individual actions, their broader social presence is ephemeral. Like a shoddy relative, an activist's action will be aggressively present for perhaps a day, perhaps a week, perhaps a month. But then it will be gone, perhaps forever. This is reinforced by the natural personal politics that come with the combination of a small group placed under enormous strain. Unless intensive measures are taken, a degree of exclusion will predominate at any activist group. That said, an activist group's structure does not naturally coincide with the possibility of an 'everyday' interaction with their community, which brings the threat of a further narrowing of the group's interests and an unhealthy intermixing of friend groups and activist politics. But even in a group unafflicted by these tendencies, the prospect of day-in, day-out participation in an activist planning com-

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66 A particular example of this is the oft repeated viewpoint that had the Occupiers read more Marx or been more hierarchical they could somehow have 'won', whatever this means. That such a viewpoint comes from the mouths of self professedly materialistic Marxists is absurd to say the least.

67 The entire argument regarding consensus is a prime example of this: the search for a perfect organizational format overshoot a discussion of the specific cultural/organizational atmosphere that consensus flourished in.

mittee seems like some obscure circle of hell designed for people who never brought food to potlucks.

While the internet has become indispensable for activist organizing, it has also posed the danger of accentuating their worst problems. Among these is the constant illusion of protesting for the press, of making one's constituency not the people immediately involved to the action but to the public, mediated through the press and the internet. This was already criticized in the 90s, but has if anything gotten worse. Focusing on a mediated constituency, especially in a time of short media cycles, is always going to bring at most ephemeral gains. The continued suffering of Flint showcases the issues inherent in this media centric strategy.

This brings up the main failing of activist groups. Despite the tactics used, despite the militancy of its members, or the format of the group, an activist organization contains no mechanism within itself to solve most of the problems it broaches. This, of course, depends on the problem: Antifa actions have proven successful at disrupting organizing attempts by fascists. Even then, there have been numerous discussions of the need to go beyond 'tactical' antifascism towards a broader anti-fascism which confronts fascism on broader fronts and stems the ideology off at the root.<sup>68</sup> This strategy necessarily draws analogies to the United Front between the German Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party during the Weimar period, arguing that the Left needs to create a broad popular front with, perhaps, liberals and parties in government, to stem the tide of a resurgent fascism.

This conclusion points at the precise problem of activist organizations: while they are suited to street level battles and sometimes even a massive series of street level battles occurring across a whole country, they are organizationally incapable of winning the war. This is even easier to see when we look at issues outside of fascism, for instance the activities of Occupy Wall Street. An activist organization which attempts to change the economic direction of a country is, quite simply, not able to do it within itself, and no action it pursues is necessarily going to achieve these goals. In earlier periods, activists organized with mutual aid groups, both as a way to support themselves through an action and as a different economic model to aim towards. But now that the role of mutual aid organizations have been by and large overtaken by the state, nearly all activist organizations are at the very least indirectly aimed at petitioning the state to change its policies. This is apparent to the degree that even the often embarrassingly militant Crimethinc's piece "Why we don't make demands" creates a reformist argument:

Even if your intention is simply to negotiate, you put yourself in a weaker bargaining position by spelling out from the beginning the least it would take to appease you. No shrewd negotiator begins by making concessions. It's smarter to appear implacable: So you want to come to terms? Make us an offer. In the meantime, we'll be here blocking the freeway and setting things on fire.<sup>69</sup>

Why reject demands of the government? Why, to better make demands of the government! Why riot, destroying infrastructure and property? Why, to make sure that the government hears our voice!

I am not judging the adoption of violent tactics here, and in fact I think that the whole "violence vs. nonviolence" discourse has made remarkable strides in the last few years. The adoption of violent tactics is often a response to desperate situations on the ground, so a mere argument against violent tac-

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68 West & Richardson, "The Dover debate: in defense of mass anti-fascism"

69 Crimethinc, "Why We Don't Make Demands"

tics is going to do little to change people's minds. But this thread of reformism is why there is such a tendency, in 'professional' activists, to move towards parliamentary politics. After all, if one is rioting, fighting with the police, constantly under threat of murder or arrest, merely to petition the government, then what is the point in not running in the Democratic party? If an alliance with parliamentary parties is necessary to stop fascism, then why not avoid all this hardship, and merely become a GOTV worker?

## **VI. Considerations on Contemporary Leftism**

The move by many of the Left's intellectuals to the idea of party building, or party cooption, makes perfect sense in this light. The wall that activist movements have continually hit upon is the fact that no matter how good their tactics, no matter how perfect their organizational chart is, no matter how immaculate their strategies, they are pushing for a change in government policy which relies on actions within the government. It is a natural progression to move from focusing on influencing the state to focusing on participating in the state. And, in an environment so dominated by the petty discourses of intellectuals and the ephemerality of activist groups, party-builders see themselves as the harbingers of a return to a period when the Left was taken seriously.

In doing so the party builders have attempted to create centralized edifices in order to better adopt the tactics the leadership views as necessary. These moves have been, or at least were, supported within some sections of the Leftist press:

"For many of its critical voices the possibility of shaping a party in the image of the 15-M, and of its radically democratic spirit, were sacrificed at the altar of Errejón's vaunted "electoral war machine." For sympathizers of the leadership line, and indeed the members who overwhelmingly supported Iglesias's quasi-Leninist plea for centralism and efficacy, the sacrifice was worth it."<sup>70</sup>

The issue with this model is not the Laclauan style 'populist' terms it justifies itself on--after all, these new theoretical groundings are necessary in a world where the Marxist 'brand' is seen as a limitation to succeeding in politics. But these justifications are secondary to practices; a party can use the most revolutionary and innovative rhetoric out and still be a run of the mill social democratic party. This is the case with the new wave of leftist parties, who are not organizationally or strategically revolutionary, but who hide their status as normalized political parties behind a veneer of leftist rhetoric.

Yes, the new leftist parties have large voting rolls, and sometimes win elections. But it takes more than a large membership base to be a mass party. The Communist parties of the mid 20th century were not radical purely due to their contributions to magazines and journals, were not mass parties purely due to their size. The new Leftist parties are not social spaces and are not centers for activist or intellectual activity: they are places where social activity is consumed under the altar of electoralism. Looking at their actions rather than their words shows parties which attempt to gobble up the activist groups they came from, which sideline organizational democracy in order to better commit to realpolitik, which have ignored the day to day organizing of their members in favor of a year to year organizing of their constituents. To be a member of Podemos, Syriza, the Fronte de Gauche, means little more than an expression of political opinions, means little more than pulling a lever every couple of years. Organizing should mean more than this.

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70 Jacobin Magazine, "Portrait of a Leader as a Young Theorist"

The rise of these new Leftist currents has not been limited to continental Europe. The Anglosphere, long dominated by 'soft' left parties, have seen a wave of excitement about attempts to 'take the Labour/Democratic Party back'. The problem is not merely that there has never really been a 'radical' Labour/Democratic party to take back. The problem is that such a large segment of the organized Left has been engaged in these efforts. 2016 has not only brought out a new passion for social democracy à la mode, it has brought a moderation of dozens of major Leftist organizations across Great Britain and the United States in an attempt to capture the wave of left populism.

This is not some mass failure of ideology, not some collective inability to read the right quotations of Lenin. It is the temptation of achieving some semblance of state power balanced against nothing. In a Leftist ecology dominated by parties, activist groups, and intellectuals, the balancing system which existed in the late 19th-early 20th century is trampled under a gallop towards the state. The logic of most activist groups naturally inclines them to promote 'one of their own' towards the seat of power in order to better influence policy and public opinion, and intellectual journals, under the pressure to get yet more clicks, have shown a flexibility which would make the greatest gymnast blush at the self contorting justifications we are confronted with daily.

To criticize these tendencies on the level of intellectual debate is to miss the point, because these issues do not arise from personal failings but from the tendencies imbued in their practices. So long as activism is viewed as a petition to the government there will be a push towards reformism, and so long as the movements are unable to solve the problems they present activism will be viewed as a petition to the government. This is not an issue of understanding, and correct theory cannot prevent this tendency towards reformism no more than a poem can stop a fire. So long as taking government power is seen as the real objective of radical politics, all the journal entries and articles in the world will not be able to stop the march towards the Democratic party and the project for a new labor/social democratic party. The creation of mutual aid societies, not aimed at supplying the events of the milieu but at providing the social services which people need in their daily lives, is a way not only of creating a solid alternative to the push towards collaboration, but is desperately necessary in these dark times.

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# Accumulation by dispossession and Imperial Competition

The Political Economy of the Crisis in Ukraine  
Christopher McAndrew

**ABSTRACT:** *This paper intends to examine the conflict between the European Union and the Russian Federation over Ukraine through a Marxist lens. Firstly, the paper unpacks the concept of interstate competition, the dominant explanation for the conflict, and explores how the tendency of states towards territorial expansionism has been subordinated to capitalist logics with the development of monopoly capitalism. Using this framework, it aims to demonstrate that the conflict, rather than solely a product of geopolitics, is a conflict between rival capitalist powers who are seeking solutions to their crises of political economy following the 2008 recession by turning to regions external to themselves. In particular, it examines the role of the overaccumulation of capital in these two imperial powers, and using David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession, show how this crisis and its attempted resolution through the opening up of non-capitalist territories to capital accumulation has shaped the character of these powers and their interests in Ukraine. Using these frameworks, the paper demonstrates that the conflict in Ukraine is, ultimately, a conflict between two imperial powers over the right to dispossession.*

## I. Introduction

In 2014, Sakwa writes that “history returned to Europe with a vengeance” with a crisis that has bought “not only the spectre but the reality of war, on the one hundredth anniversary of a conflict that had been spoken of as the war to end all war.”<sup>71</sup> As McMahon writes, the crisis in Ukraine began “as a protest against the government dropping plans to forge closer trade ties with the European Union,” which went on to spark “a global standoff between Russia and Western powers.” McMahon states that the most dramatic moment of the confrontation, the seizure of the Crimean peninsula and the port city of Sevastopol in the weeks following Yanukovych’s ousting “signaling Moscow’s intent to expand its sphere of 12 influence into Eastern Europe.”<sup>72</sup> Some writers, such as Trenin, speak of a new age of interstate competition, stating that the crisis “has ended the period in Russian-Western relations that began with the fall of the Berlin Wall...Great-Power competition is back.”<sup>73</sup>

So far, most explanations of the Ukrainian Crisis have come from a realist perspective. Mearsheimer, for instance, places the blame squarely on the West. In his view, the taproot of the crisis is NATO expansion, driven by a misguided liberalism which intends “to make the entire continent look like western Europe.”<sup>74</sup> Putin, meanwhile, is portrayed as a “first class strategist” who is merely reacting to the “legitimate security concerns” posed by Western expansionism.<sup>75</sup> Alternatively, Stestanovich sees Putin as a leader who made “impulsive decisions that subordinated Russia’s national interest to his own personal political motives.”<sup>76</sup> Van Herpen states those personal motives are to “put an

71 Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2015) pg. Xi

72 Robert McMahon, “Ukraine in Crisis.” *Council on Foreign Relations* 5 (2014) pg. 1

73 Dmitri Trenin, ‘The Ukraine Crisis and the Resumption of Great Power Rivalry’ *Carnegie Moscow Center, Temmuz* 2014) pp. 2-3

74 John J. Mearsheimer ‘Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault.’ *Foreign Affairs* 93:5 (2014) pg. 83

75 Ibid pg. 84

76 Michael McFaul, Stephen Sestanovich, and John J. Mearsheimer. ‘Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis.’ *Foreign Affairs* 93 (2014) pg. 172

end to Russia's 'humiliation' and to restore the lost empire,"<sup>77</sup> and laments Russia's inability to become "a normal, post-imperial country" like those in the West.<sup>78</sup> These authors see the conflict as primarily a clash of idealisms. To some, it is Putin's Eurasianist vision which prevents Russia from becoming a 'normal' country, and that in turn prevents it from allowing Ukraine to do the same. From this perspective, the West has only acted rationally towards this Russian delusion of grandeur. To others, it is the West's liberal internationalism that compelled it to naively expand into Russia's sphere of influence. Meanwhile, Russia only acted rationally in defending its own national interests. The conflict is explained in terms of the 'bad ideas' of whichever state the author wishes to criticise, which contrasts the rational realism of those they wish to defend. In both these explanations, the problem is that the actor they wish to criticise is not being rational enough, unlike those they wish to praise, who are seen as paragons of realist thinking.

It is undeniable that these ideas have played a huge part in putting West and East on a collision course. However, it is rarely discussed where these ideas come from, what purpose they serve, or whose interests they seek to protect. Obsessed with Putins and Obamas of the world, there has been little discussion of the internal forces that have demanded expansions, of which classes have benefited from the movements which sparked this confrontation, and which groups stand to lose out. The niceties of the prelude of the crisis, Ukrainian President Yanukovich's rejection of an EU Association Agreement (AA) in favour of a \$15bn agreement with Russia's Eurasian Customs Union (ECU), is only interpreted in terms of power politics. Stestanovich dismisses the rejected AA as a "mere free trade agreement,"<sup>79</sup> while Mearsheimer only sees it as a "stalking horse for NATO membership."<sup>80</sup> But within the Association Agreement, and within years of growing investment in Ukraine by both Western and Russian capital, lie a factor in the crisis that has yet to be properly discussed.

Therefore, I propose to look at the conflict from a Marxist perspective. A Marxist perspective proposes to examine international relations through two lenses - the contradictions of the capitalist system and the crises generated by them, and how states manage conflict between different social classes. In particular, I wish to focus on the role economic crises have played in spurring these two blocs to compete over access to Ukraine. Since 2008, the world capitalist economy has experienced severe social, political, and economic crises. In the past, capitalist states have turned to expansionism to resolve these crises. Arendt notes that the colonisation of Africa was preceded by "a curious kind of economic crisis, the overproduction of capital and the emergence of 'superfluous' money, the result of oversaving, which could no longer find productive investment within the national borders,"<sup>81</sup> a process which Lenin states caused an "intense struggle for the division and re-division of the world"<sup>82</sup> between the great powers that proved fatal in the 1914-18 war. In my view, the current crisis requires us to go beyond the classic Marxist studies of imperialism through the use of David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession. Harvey advances that to solve this problem of 'superfluous money', the overaccumulation of capital, "non-capitalist territories should be forced open

77 Marcel H. Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) pg. 61

78 Ibid pg. 239

79 Stestanovich, 'Faulty Powers' pg. 174

80 Mearsheimer 'Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault' pg. 74

81 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando, Harcourt Publishing Company, 1976) pg. 135

82 Vladimir I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1975) pg. 150

not only to trade...but also to permit capital to invest in profitable ventures.”<sup>83</sup> State-run industries must be denationalised, family farming replaced by large-scale agribusiness, and increasingly intellectual property rights must be enforced.<sup>84</sup> This is the process of accumulation by dispossession, a process which sees assets previously seen as common property released at a cut-price rate which international capital can “seize hold of...and immediately put to profitable use.”<sup>85</sup>

This dissertation shall be split into three sections. In the first section, I wish to survey a selection of the existing Marxist literature on imperialism, and examine the economic and social crises of capitalism that capitalist states seek to resolve with expansionism and dispossession. I will pay particular attention to the chronic rise of “superfluous money”, the overaccumulation of capital, since the 1970s and demonstrate how accumulation by dispossession, particularly through the privatisation of state assets both at home and in imperial conquests abroad, is currently the main means by which capitalism is attempting to resolve this crisis following the 2008 recession. In the second section, I wish to examine the political economies of two of the main players in the Ukrainian crisis, the European Union and the Russian Federation, and demonstrate how and why these powers have resorted to the dispossession of countries on their periphery in recent years. In the final section, I wish to demonstrate that the conflict in Ukraine is ultimately a conflict over the ‘right to dispossess’, and show how Ukrainian workers can and are fighting this dispossession.

## **II. Accumulation by Dispossession and the Roots of Imperialism Today**

### **a. Imperialism is no more?**

Firstly, it is worth defining not only what is meant by imperialism, but also what is meant by a Marxist explanation of imperialism. Both are points of contention. Cohen states that most definitions of imperialism include “more than formally annexed lands.”<sup>86</sup> But Cohen also states that imperialism does “not necessarily encompass all forms of international inequality, despite the contrary views of surviving Marxist-Leninists.”<sup>87</sup> This is symptomatic of a common misunderstanding of how Marxists approach imperialism. Schumpeter considers that the approach can be summed up by “the theory of classes and the theory of accumulation” alone and finds it incredible that “the whole maze of international politics seems to be cleared up by a single powerful stroke of analysis.”<sup>88</sup> With this section, I wish to clarify what is meant by a Marxist explanation of imperialism, and dispel the idea that Marxism is a crude economic determinism.

In order to understand the essence of a Marxist approach to imperialism, it is necessary to unpack Schumpeter’s perspective. For Schumpeter, the logic of capitalism is at odds with the logic of territorial expansion. Instead, it is a product of the generals, aristocrats, and the remnants of the feudal state which capital would sweep away. States are driven by pre-capitalist tendencies characterised by a strong drive “towards forcible expansion without definite, utilitar-

83 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2003) pg. 139

84 Ibid pg. 146

85 Ibid pg. 149

86 Ariel Cohen, *Russian Imperialism: Development and Crisis* (Westport, Praeger Publishers, 1998) pg. 1

87 Ibid pg. 4

88 Joseph Schumpeter [1943], *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (London, Routledge, 2003) pg. 51

ian limits.”<sup>89</sup> Expansion is a product of the state’s drive for power for power’s sake. For Schumpeter, empire is purely a product of what Harvey defines as a territorial logic, “the political, diplomatic and military strategies invoked and used by a territorially defined entity such as a state as it struggles to assert its interests and accumulate power in its own right.”<sup>90</sup> This contrasts a capitalistic logic focusing on “how economic power flows across and through continuous space...and typically seeks to accumulate more capital.”<sup>91</sup> For Schumpeter, territorial logic is inherently “objectless,” and all interests who would ally with it flow from “non-capitalist sources...mercenary groups and bellicose adventurers among the nobili,”<sup>92</sup> sources which capitalism suppresses rather than creates. Under capitalism, instinct which is only instinct, such as the aristocrat’s drive for territory “languishes relatively quickly in the capitalist world, just as does an inefficient economic practice.”<sup>93</sup> In Schumpeter’s view, whether a state engages in imperialism is a question of power for power’s sake versus accumulation for accumulation’s sake, with the latter’s economic rationality creating a population unwilling to engage in the atavistic, glory seeking expansionism of the former.

Harvey accepts that these two logics “are rather different,” and often contradict each other.<sup>94</sup> Tilly notes capitalists have often “offered concerted resistance to the extension of state power.”<sup>95</sup> But if we look at the issue historically, we find that territorialism and capitalism are not alternative strategies of state formation. Arrighi finds the rise of the modern state system is “both the main cause and the effect of the endless accumulation of capital,”<sup>96</sup> leading him to state they operate “not in isolation from one another but in relation to one another, within a given spatio-temporal context.” The result is that international relations frequently follows neither logics, producing outcomes which depart “significantly, even diametrically, from what is implicit in each logic conceived abstractly,” but ultimately always includes elements of both.<sup>97</sup> This leads us to Harvey’s assertion that the relationship between territorialism and capitalism is that of “two distinctive but intertwined logics of power,” and that their relationship should be seen as “problematic and often contradictory (that is, dialectical).”<sup>98</sup> The policy of state is a result of the interaction between these two logics.

Arrighi notes that the balance of this dialectic depends on “the form and intensity of competition” between different capitalist enterprises and states themselves in the international system.<sup>99</sup> Mandel states that with the emergence of large corporations (that he refers to as “monopoly capitalism”), this competition “assumes a new dimension.” Instead of small firms, at stake now were “industrial and financial giants whose assets ran into the tens of millions.”<sup>100</sup> Harvey advances that a core difference between the logic of territory and capital is that “capitalist firms come and go...but states are long-lived entities confined within fixed territorial boundaries.”<sup>101</sup> However, this conclusion

89 Joseph Schumpeter [1955], *Imperialism and Social Classes: Two Essays* (Cleveland, The World Publishing Company, 1966) pg. 64

90 David Harvey, *Spaces of Neoliberalization: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, Wiesbaden, 2005) pg. 82

91 Ibid pg. 82

92 Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes*, pg. 74

93 Ibid pg. 69

94 Harvey, *Spaces of Neoliberalization*, pg. 83

95 Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1984) pg. 140

96 Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London, Verso, 2002) pg.32

97 Ibid pg. 34

98 Harvey, *The New Imperialism* pg. 30

99 Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, pg. 32

100 Ernest Mandel, *The Meaning of the Second World War* (London, Verso, 1986) pg. 11

101 Harvey, *Spaces of Neoliberalization*, pg. 82

precedes the notion of monopoly capitalism. Mandel advances that as the great companies of the world develop, and the capitalist mode of production becomes dominant in a given territory, states have little choice but to involve themselves “more and more directly” in their competition.<sup>102</sup> Schumpeter advances that “very little influence on foreign policy has been exerted by big business - or by the haute finance from the Fuggers to the Morgans.”<sup>103</sup> But this implies that states have had much choice in the matter. With the expansion of capitalism, Harvey notes that Schumpeter’s imperialists, the old aristocratic states, find themselves converted “to a distinctively capitalistic logic.”<sup>104</sup> Managing periodic crises of capitalism becomes an ever greater responsibility of the state, and territorial logics of power find themselves subordinated to their internal capitalist dynamics as competition with trusts in other countries intensifies.

This has dramatic consequences for foreign policy. We see these territorial logics no longer becoming “objectless”, as Schumpeter advances, but far more subordinated to the needs of capital as it outgrows its home nation. Mandel notes that increasingly capitalism spills out “across the boundaries of nation-states, even the largest ones.”<sup>105</sup> For instance, Harvey cites the crises in Europe in the 1870s in which capital was “forced outwards to swamp the world in a massive wave of speculative investment and trade.”<sup>106</sup> Harvey notes the need to protect these foreign ventures “put pressure on states to respond to this expansionary capitalist logic,”<sup>107</sup> lest there be ramifications for their home-grown capitalists. This is the basis of Lenin’s conclusion that imperialism is ultimately “capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established.”<sup>108</sup> Arendt states this development is not, as Lenin advances, the final stage of capitalism, but instead “the first stage of the political rule of the bourgeoisie,” having achieved a level of economic dominance that is able to subject territorial logics to its whims.<sup>109</sup> Modern imperialism, rather than a result of either territorial or capitalistic logic alone, represents their synthesis. Rather than rendering the “objectless” drive for conquest obsolete, capitalism’s economic rationality gives it new purpose. The rise of the bourgeoisie and the pressure on states to facilitate a never-ending accumulation of property has been at the forefront of many states’ drive for a never-ending accumulation of power, growing as capital’s reach outgrows its homeland.

Many criticisms of a Marxist interpretations of imperialism lie in a crude caricature of economic determinism and an insistence of the separation of the territorial interests of “the state” and the capitalistic logic of “civil society.” In actuality, a Marxist view takes these two logics are intrinsically connected, having arisen together and both having a huge influence on each other. Marxists do not reject the existence of an autonomous state interest - what they reject is that the state exists in a vacuum, separate from the class makeup and the processes of its internal capitalist economy. The results of their interaction frequently have ramifications for international politics, especially in times of intense crises of capital accumulation which see capital spring from nation-state to seek out new, more profitable investments. It would be logical to expect a resurgence in the study of the impacts of capitalist crises on foreign policy following the upheavals of 2007-8. However, in contemporary explanations of international relations, the second half of this dialectic, capital accumulation, is

102 Mandel, *The Meaning of the Second World War*, pg. 11

103 Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, pg. 55

104 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 43

105 Mandel, *The Meaning of the Second World War*, pg. 11

106 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 43

107 Ibid pg. 43

108 Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* pg. 106

109 Hannah Arendt, *Imperialism* (New York, Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1968) pg. 18

missing. This has been most clear in analysis of the Ukrainian crisis. With this first section, I wish to reinsert capital accumulation back into the study of this crisis by examining some of the core contradictions of modern capitalism, how they can and have in the past resolved through a specific type of imperial conquest, and how these contradictions manifest themselves in the main players in this crisis.

## **b. Luxemburg's Dilemma – The Role of Dispossession in Capitalist Economies**

We have established that capitalist states turn to imperialism in order to resolve an endless accumulation of capital and resolve its crises. It is worth examining which crisis imperialism aims to solve, and how it goes about doing it. In order to do so, we will unpack one of the classic Marxist accounts of imperialism, Rosa Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital*. Luxemburg sees imperialism as capital's solution to the contradiction of underconsumption, as a means to continue accumulation when neither capitalists nor workers earn enough to buy back the commodities created by capitalism. The solution is that capital must "find a market outside the closed circle" – the peasant societies of the pre-capitalist world would provide the demand for capitalism's surplus commodities.<sup>110</sup> Luxemburg advances that capital requires a non-capitalist exterior "as a market for its surplus value, as a source of supply for its means of production and as a reservoir of labour power for its wage system."<sup>111</sup> Peasant communities based on common ownership of the land had to be dispossessed because within these societies "there is no demand, or very little, for foreign goods."<sup>112</sup> Luxemburg states that this dispossession would be the cause of the final crisis of capitalism, as once the exclusive rule of capital has been established, and all other social formations have been subjected to it, "accumulation, i.e. further expansion of capital, becomes impossible."<sup>113</sup> Demand from the non-capitalist milieu "is indispensable for accumulation," but capital cannot help "at the cost of this medium nevertheless, by eating it up" and reproducing underconsumption anew.<sup>114</sup> A contradiction is found - "capital cannot accumulate without the aid of non-capitalist organisations, nor, on the other hand, can it tolerate their continued existence side by side with itself."<sup>115</sup> The implication of Luxemburg's findings is that non-capitalist environs must be kept in a pre-capitalist state and dependent on commodities produced in the metropolises.

Harvey notes that this explanation would account "for the fiercely repressive qualities of many of the colonial regimes."<sup>116</sup> But in actuality, we see colonialism was unable to solve underconsumption. Mandel notes that given the poverty of the colonies, "their demand for manufactured goods was inherently limited"<sup>117</sup> and Harvey states that the open dynamic of trade with America did "far more for Britain than did the repressed colonial empire in India."<sup>118</sup> This could mean that colonialism was simply a fetter from capital's point of view, "a case of a territorial logic inhibiting the capitalistic logic," as Harvey suggests.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, the problem of underconsumption identified by Luxemburg could

110 Rosa Luxemburg [1915], *The Accumulation of Capital – An Anti-Critique* (London, Penguin, 1972) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/anti-critique/ch02.htm> [accessed 7/5/2016]

111 Rosa Luxemburg [1913] *The Accumulation of Capital* (Abingdon, Routledge Classics, 2003) pp. 348-349

112 Ibid pg. 349

113 Luxemburg, *Anti-Critique* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/anti-critique/ch06.htm> [accessed 7/5/2016]

114 Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, pg. 397

115 Ibid pg. 397

116 Harvey, *The New Imperialism* pg. 138

117 Mandel, *The Meaning of the Second World War*, pg. 12

118 Harvey, *The New Imperialism* pg. 140

119 Ibid pg. 140



“easily be covered by reinvestment which generates its own demand for capital goods and other inputs,”<sup>120</sup> leaving imperialism at best unnecessary and at worst a further fetter on capital. For an argument intending to show the necessity of imperialism to capitalism, Luxemburg’s argument does the opposite. At face value, it seems Luxemburg’s account offers little for those seeking an explanation for imperialism’s continued persistence.

However, there is more to Luxemburg’s analysis than is often acknowledged. Within her own analysis, there is a suggestion that the “eating up” of non-capitalist economies by capital is more than just a barrier to demand, but is an essential feature of accumulation. When discussing French colonial policy in Algeria, Luxemburg writes that Arab peasants “had to be deprived of the land they had owned for a thousand years, so that French capitalists could get it.”<sup>121</sup> The peasantry is not only being dispossessed in order to draw them out of their commons to buy surplus commodities, but the land is being turned into a commodity in itself. As Luxemburg notes herself, “to accumulate capital does not mean to produce higher and higher mountains of commodities, but to convert more and more commodities into money capital.”<sup>122</sup> To continue accumulation is the end goal of capital - the means by which this is accomplished, whether through the immediate sale of commodities or otherwise, is incidental. We see this accumulation intensifying, not ending, through the dispossession of peasant land in America (as Bieler et al notes, “Luxemburg does not confine capitalism’s ‘outside’ to a territorial phenomenon” of colonial possessions alone),<sup>123</sup> in which “the most fertile and most favourably situated lands were retained by the companies who farmed them extensively on completely capitalistic lines.”<sup>124</sup> On this land “surplus value was produced with the application of all the resources known to modern science and technology,”<sup>125</sup> and former peasants are converted into “wage-slaves of capital.”<sup>126</sup> While it is undeniable that this means that newly proletarianised peasant is “forced to sell all his produce and to buy his requirements from the manufacturers in the form of ready-made goods,”<sup>127</sup> what is overlooked is that this land has become a field of accumulation in itself. Land and labour which was previously seen as part of a peasant economy based on “production for personal need,”<sup>128</sup> continues production but now in the service of capital. The drawing in of natural economies into the thrall of capital is essential to expanding accumulation, rather than part of its demise.

Dispossession is not only a means of creating a market for goods, as Luxemburg advances, but a means of transforming these regions into new terrains of profitable investment, and a means of accumulation in itself. This is missed, as Harvey notes, due to a view of the crisis as one purely based in underconsumption, a conception which does not address “overaccumulation...the lack of profitable investment as the fundamental problem”<sup>129</sup> rather than underconsumption alone. This suggests that non-capitalist sectors should be “forced open not only to trade...but also to permit capital to invest in profitable ventures.”<sup>130</sup> Therefore, it is worth adding a fourth category to Luxemburg’s analy-

120 Ibid pg. 139

121 Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, pg. 360

122 Luxemburg, *Anti-Critique* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/anti-critique/ch02.htm> [accessed 7/5/2016]

123 Andreas Bieler, Sümercan Bozkurt, Max Crook, Peter S. Cruttenden, Ertan Erol, Adam David Morton, Cemal Burak Tansel and Elif Uzgören, ‘The enduring relevance of Rosa Luxemburg’s *The Accumulation of Capital*’ *Journal of International Relations and Development* (2014) pg.3

124 Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, pg. 383

125 Ibid pg. 383

126 Ibid pg. 391

127 Ibid pg. 381

128 Ibid pg. 385

129 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 139

130 Ibid pg. 139

sis - capitalism needs non-capitalist exteriors not only as a market for its commodities, for cheap raw materials, and for cheap labour, but also in order to convert sectors previously seen as part of the commons into new markets for profitable investment. As Luxemburg advances, “only the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organisations makes accumulation of capital possible,”<sup>131</sup> but for more reasons than Luxemburg advances. In order to continue an endless accumulation of property, capital must transform non-capitalist environs into a means of accumulation too.

The dispossession of common property is a core part of expanding accumulation. This conclusion forms the basis of Harvey’s concept of accumulation by dispossession. Although Levien notes even today “rural land has become a major locus of such dispossession,”<sup>132</sup> it is important to broaden the concept of the commons beyond that of agrarian questions. As Harvey notes, this category goes beyond non-capitalist modes of production and includes “some sector within capitalism...that has not yet been proletarianized,”<sup>133</sup> including state owned industries and social services such as education. Indeed, for Harvey privatisation is the “key element” of accumulation by dispossession, the policy by which states are able to release common property for overaccumulated capital to “seize hold of...and immediately put to profitable use.” Accumulation by dispossession is therefore a process which draws in non-capitalist sectors hitherto seen as common property into the realm of capital accumulation. It also must be seen as driven by crisis, by capital’s need to find new profitable investment and resolve a crisis of overaccumulation.

### c. The Overaccumulation of Capital

As mentioned earlier, accumulation by dispossession is driven by a specific kind of crisis which Harvey refers to as overaccumulation of capital, a problem which he asserts has been a “chronic and enduring problem” in the world economy since the slump of 1973.<sup>134</sup> In order to assess the concept, it is necessary to discuss what such a crisis entails, and why it has become such a problem. Overaccumulation is a concept derived out of a reformulation of Marx’s theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and occurs when “the mass of surplus value produced cannot keep pace with the expansion of the amount of capital looking to capture it.”<sup>135</sup> The mass of capital seeking profitable outlets exceeds the profitable avenues in which it can be invested. The usual result for capital in such a situation is a crisis. Marx states that equilibrium “would be restored under all circumstances through the withdrawal or even the destruction of more or less capital.”<sup>136</sup> Harvey echoes this, stating that if the rate of profit is to be restored “a portion of the total capital must be eliminated”<sup>137</sup> in a process defined as devaluation.

Devaluation is, according to Harvey, “the underside of overaccumulation,”<sup>138</sup> and the conventional means through which capitalism resolves this crisis. Marx states that devaluation consists of the “momentous suspension of labour and annihilation of a great portion of the capital” in which capital is violently reduced “to the point where it can go on.”<sup>139</sup> These devaluations, in a

131 Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, pg. 397

132 Michael Levien, ‘The Politics of Dispossession Theorizing India’s “Land Wars,”’ *Politics & Society* 41:3 (2013) pg. 353

133 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 141

134 Ibid pg. 108

135 David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1982) pg. 197

136 Karl Marx ed Friedrich Engels [1894], *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume III* (New York, International Publishers, 1967) [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_Capital\\_Vol\\_3.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Capital_Vol_3.pdf) [accessed 7/5/2016] pg. 174

137 Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* pg. 193

138 Ibid pg. 195

139 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin, 1973) pg. 750

sense, effectively wipe the slate clean for capital. Unprofitable avenues are destroyed and new ones are created through the devaluations of smaller competitor businesses. These can then be bought for fire-sale prices by the survivors, or as Marx puts it “the progressive expropriation of the more or less direct producers.”<sup>140</sup> As mentioned previously, Harvey includes the absorption of these devalued businesses within the concept of accumulation by dispossession, something which has been criticised. Mercille & Murphy state that this “is simply a transfer of assets from one capitalist to another and is inherent to the normal processes of accumulation.”<sup>141</sup> But this overlooks that this devaluation plays the same role as accumulation by dispossession, in that it opens up new avenues for capital accumulation. The difference is that it does so within the existing realms of capital accumulation through the destruction of the small capitalists and the capital they possess. The result of this destruction of production, and the release of the assets of the smaller capitalists, “would have prepared — within capitalistic limits — a subsequent expansion of production”<sup>142</sup> and is according to Kliman “a main cause in the booms that follow.”<sup>143</sup>

Clarke notes that to show capitalist crises are possible is “a relatively trivial exercise.” But to show they are necessary to capitalism’s continued functioning, “is a much harder task,”<sup>144</sup> but one which is necessary to show how overaccumulation became the problem it is today. As capitalism develops, and the amount of surplus capital that cannot find a profitable outlet grows with it, Marx states repetition of this crisis must occur “on a higher scale.”<sup>145</sup> The intensity of crisis required to restore capital’s profitability must grow with it. There is no better example than the golden age of capitalism which followed the Wall Street Crash and the Second World War, with Kliman asserting that “the massive destruction of capital value that took place during...set the stage for the boom that followed.”<sup>146</sup> This boom had run out by the mid-1970s. But capital has not experienced a crash on such a scale since. It is understandable that policymakers would wish to avoid another Great Depression and the social fallout associated with it. Under such a crisis, Marx notes that the antagonisms “between each individual capitalist’s interests and those of the capitalist class as a whole...come to the surface.”<sup>147</sup> Competition intensifies as various sections of capital fight over who must bear the losses, and the class as a whole “as such must inevitably lose.”<sup>148</sup> By throwing workers out of work, or as Harvey puts it, “discarding variable capital,” capital reduces the reserve army of labour “to a miserable state,”<sup>149</sup> something which Kliman states triggered a “wave of radicalisation of working people” in the 30s.<sup>150</sup> The consequence of such a crisis according to Harvey is that “the reproduction of class relations in put in jeopardy,”<sup>151</sup> and Kliman notes the legacy of that class struggle has “helped shaped economic policy” in order to prevent such a repeat.<sup>152</sup> However, Kliman states “If capital value has been destroyed on a massive scale, the peak rate of profit in the boom that follows is likely to be higher than the prior peak.”<sup>153</sup> We

140 Marx, *Capital Volume III*, pg. 150

141 Julien Mercille and Enda Murphy, ‘Conceptualising European Privatisation Processes After the Great Recession,’ *Antipode* (2015) pg. 9

142 Marx, *Capital Volume III* pg. 175

143 Andrew Kliman, *The Failure of Capitalist Production: Underlying Causes of the Great Recession* (London, Pluto Press, 2009) pg. 29

144 Simon Clarke, ‘The Marxist theory of overaccumulation and crisis’ *Science & Society* 54:4 (1990) pg. 442

145 Marx, *Grundrisse*, pg. 750

146 Kliman, *The Failure of Capitalist Production*, pg. 23

147 Marx, *Capital Volume III*, pg. 174

148 Ibid pg. 174

149 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 88

150 Kliman, *The Failure of Capitalist Production*, pg. 24

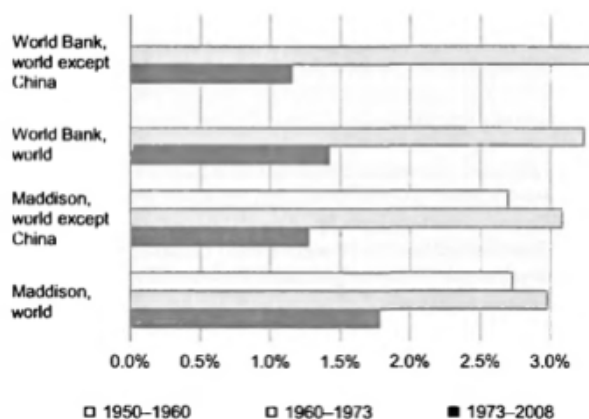
151 Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, pg. 202

152 Kliman, *The Failure of Capitalist Production*, pg. 24

153 Ibid pg. 25

can also infer the opposite - if capital value has not been destroyed on a massive scale, we are unlikely to see a subsequent restoration of the rate of profit, and that has been the story of the world economy after the 1970s. Since the subsequent boom is a result of the bust that preceded it, Kliman asserts that the world economy has “never fully recovered from the slump of the 1970s”<sup>154</sup> and growth rates have been relatively stagnant ever since. Figure 1.1 demonstrates the dismal state of world growth since 1973.

Figure 1.1: Growth of World GDP Per Capita (average annual growth rate)



(source: Kliman, *The Failure of Capitalist Production*, pg. 53)

In order to continue accumulation in the face of stagnation, Harvey writes that capital performs what is known as a “spatio-temporal fix.”<sup>155</sup> What this entails is a combination of temporal deferral of profit realisation and geographical expansion of the market - increasing the scope of investment, and delaying the realisation of the capital that remains uninvested. Overbeek notes that from that “the temporal fix [following the 1970s] has taken the form of an unprecedented financial expansion.”<sup>156</sup> Debt and speculation absorbs surplus capital, deferring the realisation of surplus to a later date. Chesnais notes the source of financial accumulation are “the profits made in industrial production which are neither invested nor consumed by capitalists.”<sup>157</sup> This suggests that capital involved in finance is a direct result of the inability of capitalists to find profitable investments within the productive sector. With manufacturing no longer able to provide the rate of profit required, financial institutions attempt to make, as Marx puts it, “money from money”<sup>158</sup> through speculation. Roberts notes that capitalists have played a big part in attempting to restore this rate of profit “by trying to exploit workers more; by looking for yet more efficient technologies; and by speculating in unproductive areas of the economy.” In other words, state and capital have attempted to restore the rate of profit through intensifying the rate of exploitation of labour and through non-productive, speculative investments. However, By 2008, Skarstein writes that this resulted in an overac-

154 Ibid pg. 24

155 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 115

156 Henk Overbeek, 'Sovereign Debt Crisis in Euroland: Root Causes and Implications for European Integration' *The International Spectator* 47:1 pg. 33

157 Chesnais, François. "The economic foundations of contemporary imperialism." *Historical Materialism* 15.3 (2007): 121-142.

158 Michael Hudson, 'From Marx to Goldman Sachs: the fictions of fictitious capital, and the financialization of industry' *Critique* 38:3 (2010) pg. 424

cumulation of speculative capital which “exceeded its profitable possibilities.”<sup>159</sup> A declining rate of profit in finance from 2004 onwards resulted in “an increasing mass of finance capital became an unbearable burden to the economy as a whole,”<sup>160</sup> eventually becoming too much in 2008.

In this context, as Harvey notes, the neoliberal project of the privatisation of everything “makes a lot of sense.”<sup>161</sup> This overaccumulated finance capital requires a means of fixing it back into the real economy, a new terrain of profitable investment to act as a safety valve. If the capitalist class refuses to allow sections of itself to become dispossessed, other sections of society must carry the burden. It has become imperative, therefore, for global capital to perform a spatial fix and open the global commons up to accumulation. It is this stagnation, and capital’s inability to deal with it profitably, in which accumulation by dispossession is the main actor, taking central stage in the world economy.

In this first section, we have explored several key themes. We have seen how a Marxist analysis of international relations is far more than a crude economic determinism, but one that examines the dialectical interrelation between territorial and capitalistic logics. As capitalism reaches higher stages of development, the latter increasingly comes to subordinate the former, as it comes crucial for states to resolve the crises of their internal capitalist economies. Next, we have explored the role that dispossession of non-capitalist peripheries plays in continued capital accumulation. Central to these dispossessions is the commodification of sectors of society that were previously seen as common property and their transformation into new terrains of profitable investment. This is a process which David Harvey describes as accumulation by dispossession, and occurs in reaction to a specific kind of crisis, the overaccumulation of capital. Since 1973, the capitalist class has refused to allow a true crisis, one which would result in large section of capital to be dispossessed for the survivors to take a hold of, to occur. But this also means that overaccumulated capital has not been cleared out the system, new profitable outlets have not been created and stagnation and the temporal fix of debt financed growth has become the order of the day. The conclusion of all this, therefore, is that we can expect that following the 2008 recession, states will be placed under pressure to facilitate a wave of accumulation by dispossession in order to provide a spatial fix for overaccumulated capital, and we will examine this process in the next section.

### **III. Accumulation by Dispossession in the major capitalist powers – the case of the European Union and the Russian Federation**

Writing on the First World War, Lenin states that “the true class character of the war is naturally to be found, not in the diplomatic history of the...but in an analysis of the objective position of the ruling classes in all the belligerent countries.”<sup>162</sup> In order to demonstrate why the crisis has come to be, it is necessary to examine the political economies of the two main players in the Ukrainian crisis - the EU and the Russian Federation. I will demonstrate how in both of these countries, “conventional” solutions to low rates of profit, wage restraint and speculation, have not managed to resolve their internal problems. I will then go on to demonstrate examples of moments when these contradictions,

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159 Rune Skarstein, ‘Overaccumulation of productive capital or of finance capital? A view from the outskirts of a Marxist debate,’ *Investigación Económica* 70:276 pg. 82

160 Ibid pg. 82

161 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 149

162 Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* pg. 4

unresolved, have led capital to break free of these two entities, and seek to resolve their crises through the dispossession of their neighbours. It is these internal contradictions which have led these two powers to take on an expansionist character which has led them to confront one another over Ukraine.

#### a. Overaccumulation and the European Debt Crisis

First of all I will consider the crisis in the European economy, and in particular the effect of Germany's growth as an export-driven power on that crisis. In the 1980s, especially in the first half of the decade, Bruff states that West Germany's economy was "characterised by low growth and unemployment."<sup>163</sup> In other words, the German economy was facing very low profit rates. Bruff explains that capital's solution to this was to follow a strategy "capital export on one hand, and increasing demands on German labour to make painful concessions on the other."<sup>164</sup> Bieler notes that this capital export was aimed at the "[industrial] sectors that used to be the bedrock of Germany's export-led growth strategy."<sup>165</sup> Bruff states that the threat of relocation of production and investment put German employers in "a bargaining position of considerable strength."<sup>166</sup> The 1990s also saw the introduction of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which allowed the easy movement of goods and capital. In other words, wage repression and the growth of the market through the introduction of the Euro, was German capitalism's primary solution to the profitability crisis, and one which allowed it to return to an export led model of growth.

Through this process, Germany amassed an immense current account surplus. However, an export led growth model presupposes a market to export to, and as Stockhammer notes, "presupposes a group of countries running current account deficits"<sup>167</sup> that are purchasing these products. In the years 1996–2008, Germany's export volume grew twice as fast as that of the rest of the Eurozone; meanwhile, as a result of wage restraint, domestic demand in Germany declined by 1.5 percent per year against the rest of the Eurozone.<sup>168</sup> Harvey notes that in this situation these goods "must be sent elsewhere to find a fresh terrain for their profitable realization if they are not to be devalued."<sup>169</sup> In the Eurozone, this demand was provided by the Southern European periphery of Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain.<sup>170</sup> However, Harvey also notes that the markets that these goods are sent "must possess means of payment."<sup>171</sup> Overbeek notes that this current account surplus, "fed capital exports from Germany, both reinforcing the transnationalisation of German industrial capital as well as injecting speculative capital in the Southern periphery."<sup>172</sup> This provided Southern consumers with access to credit financed consumption, which Stockhammer notes became Europe's "key source of demand growth."<sup>173</sup> This was Germany's spatio-temporal fix - by temporally fixing overaccumulated profits from exports into Europe's periphery, German capital was provided with a ready market for debt fuelled consumption in Southern Europe.

<sup>163</sup> Ian Bruff, 'Germany's Agenda 2010 reforms: Passive revolution at the crossroads,' *Capital & Class* 34:3 (2010) pg. 414

<sup>164</sup> Ibid pg. 415

<sup>165</sup> Andreas Bieler *The Struggle for a Social Europe: Trade unions and the EMU in times of global restructuring* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2006) pg. 79

<sup>166</sup> Ian Bruff, 'Germany's shift from the Alliance for Jobs to Agenda 2010: The role of transnationalizing German capital,' *Debate* 16:3 (2008) pg. 282

<sup>167</sup> Engelbert Stockhammer, 'Peripheral Europe's debt and German wages: the role of wage policy in the Euro area,' *International Journal of Public Policy* 7:1-3 (2011) pg.

<sup>168</sup> Brigitte Young and Willi Semmler, 'The European Sovereign Debt Crisis. Is Germany to Blame?' *German Politics and Society* 29:1 (2011) pg. 10

<sup>169</sup> Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 117

<sup>170</sup> Stockhammer, 'Peripheral Europe's debt and German wages' pg. 87

<sup>171</sup> Harvey, *The New Imperialism* pg. 117

<sup>172</sup> Overbeek, 'Sovereign Debt Crisis in Euroland' pg. 38

<sup>173</sup> Stockhammer, 'Peripheral Europe's debt and German wages' pg. 87

## b. Speculation gives way to Dispossession

Harvey notes that resorting to the credit system “simultaneously makes territories vulnerable to flows of speculative and fictitious capital...and even, as in recent years, be used to impose savage devaluations upon them.”<sup>174</sup> This has been the fate of Europe’s debt ridden periphery, which has allowed for a new wave of accumulation by dispossession by means of IMF-EU bailouts. The starkest example is the fate of Greece, which in 2010 agreed to accept €50bn in privatisations, with the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF) overseeing the process.<sup>175</sup> When discussing Greece’s regional airport structure, HRADF noted they were “without any corporate structure” and “possess significant hidden value.”<sup>176</sup> The HRADF explicitly noted that these were assets outside the logic of capital accumulation and represented significant value if they were dispossessed. The privatisation of these airports were among the first deals to be halted by the left wing SYRIZA government in early 2015. By the end of that year, once SYRIZA had been brought to heel, their “hidden value” was bestowed on the German company Fraport.<sup>177</sup> As Mercille & Murphy note European austerity programmes “provided a strong impetus towards privatisation, in particular, as part of their conditionality,”<sup>178</sup> and are one of the main tools in the drive to dispossess Europe’s periphery.

Sandbeck and Schneider note the debt crisis has “consolidated...the European state project, but not in the manner that many of its advocates would have hoped.”<sup>179</sup> Instead, it has revealed the European project has come to manifest itself as “as a form of transnational authoritarian statism,”<sup>180</sup> whose imperialism is technocratic in essence. The result of this has been the development and tightening of legal frameworks in which “highly political questions are turned over to a seemingly technocratic surveillance framework which can trigger an automatic sanction mechanism widely detached from any parliamentary control.”<sup>181</sup> These new measures will, as the European Commission bluntly puts it, provide “a new framework of reinforced economic governance, aiming at an effective and rigorous economic surveillance.”<sup>182</sup> This is the essence of European imperialism. Out of the struggles to dispossess its debt-ridden periphery, the EU developed new, highly technocratic means to enforce economic regulations which demand austerity and privatisation to the benefit of European capital. Understanding this, we can reveal some of the objectives of the EU’s Association Agreement with Ukraine.

Ukraine is described by Shumylo-Tapiola as a nation whose transformation into a market economy “remains unfinished.”<sup>183</sup> This is echoed by Yurchenko, who states that in Ukraine “the predominant form continues to be original/primitive accumulation” which has “primarily materialised in the process

174 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 118

175 Kerin Hope, ‘Greece pushes ahead with privatisation’ *Financial Times*, June 2nd 2010 <https://next.ft.com/content/15fa34e6-6e7b-11df-ad16-00144feabdc0> [accessed 7/5/2016]

176 Hellenic Republic Assets Development Fund, ‘Regional Airports’ <http://www.hradf.com/en/regional-airports> [accessed 7/5/2016]

177 Fraport, ‘Fraport-Copelouzos Consortium Signs Contracts for Managing 14 Greek Airports’ December 14th 2015 <http://www.fraport.com/content/fraport/en/press-center/reports---publications-/press-releases/fraport-copelouzos-consortium-signs-contracts-2015.html> [accessed 7/5/2016]

178 Mercille and Murphy, ‘Conceptualising European Privatisation Processes’ pg. 2

179 Sune Sandbeck and Etienne Schneider, ‘From the sovereign debt crisis to authoritarian statism: Contradictions of the European State project,’ *New Political Economy* 19:6 (2014) pg. 847

180 Ibid pg. 849

181 Sandbeck and Schneider, ‘Contradictions of the European State project,’ pg. 852

182 European Council, *Conclusions – 16–17 December 2010, EUCO 30/1/10 REV 1* (Brussels, European Council, 2010) [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_DOC-10-5\\_en.htm?locale=en](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_DOC-10-5_en.htm?locale=en) [accessed 7/5/2016] pg. 9

183 Olga Shumylo-Tapiola, ‘Ukraine at the Crossroads: Between the EU DCFTA & Customs Union,’ *Russie. Nei. Reports* 11 (2012) pg. 3

of privatisation or...accumulation by dispossession."<sup>184</sup> Ukraine's oligarchy's main methods of accumulation has not derived from the circulation of capital or even from speculation. Instead, it comes from what Yurchenko refers to as "black holes" in the economy, through "lucrative schemes of state asset embezzlement."<sup>185</sup> It is a form of accumulation that must remain outside of the formal motions of capital, and an economy whose method of accumulation is based almost entirely on accumulation by dispossession. For this reason, Larson advances that "all oligarchs have held an interest in common: preventing the introduction of regulated and strictly enforced free markets to Ukraine, as this would significantly impact their infrastructure of profit extraction, and open up the Ukrainian market to competition from Western corporations."<sup>186</sup> Ukraine's is an economy based on dispossession. However, who benefits from this dispossession is what lies at the heart of the contention.

Ukraine was also drawn into this speculative process of credit fuelled demand followed by accumulation by dispossession. Between 1999 and 2004, Ukraine's economy followed an industry-led growth based on steel, fuelled by cheap fuel inputs from Russia.<sup>187</sup> Mykhnenko & Swain note that the Orange Revolution, which prevented the oligarchy's preferred successor Yanukovych from taking power and installed a clique of pro-European reformers, led to an "orangeist" economic model as opposed to the nepotistic, state-led export drive of the past. Instead, this new model depended "on importing capital...primarily through the European banking system." Between 2004 and 2008, Ukraine's banking sector grew from \$17 billion to \$139 billion, mostly European investment. This resulted in a large asset bubble, with stock market capitalisation as a percentage of GDP increasing by a factor of 9 over this period.<sup>188</sup> The influx of foreign banking capital resulted in the appreciation of hryvnia, which encouraged imports and the expansion of credits. As a result, Mykhnenko & Swain note that Ukraine "had been turned into a market for West European producers," and turned away from Russia and the rest of the Confederation of Independent States (CIS) of the former Soviet Union.<sup>189</sup> Therefore, as a result of the Orange Revolution, Ukraine too was drawn into Europe's spatio-temporal fix. Ukraine's banking sector, before insignificant, now was a major source of speculation for European capital. This speculation allowed for debt fuelled consumption, which provided a new market for European commodities.

As a result, like Southern Europe, Ukraine faced a sovereign debt crisis in 2008, its GDP dropping by 15% alongside national debt rising to 36% of GDP.<sup>190</sup> However, as Ukraine is outside the EU's regulatory framework, it has proven much harder for European capital to have its way and dispossess the state. By 2010 the Orangeist reformers had been ousted and replaced by President Yanukovych. Rather than reforms that would make Ukraine a safe destination for European capital, Valasek notes that Yanukovych was "focused on consolidating power and rebuilding the economy."<sup>191</sup> In 2010, Ukraine's economy was stabilised with the promise of an IMF loan in exchange for "deep so-

184 Yuliya Yurchenko, "Black Holes" in the Political Economy of Ukraine: The Neoliberalization of Europe's "Wild East", *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 20:2-3 (2012) pg. 130

185 Yurchenko, "Black Holes" in the Political Economy of Ukraine' pg. 131

186 Sean Larson, 'Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine,' *New Politics* 15:57 (2014) pg. 74

187 Vlad Mykhnenko and Adam Swain, Ukraine's diverging space-economy: The Orange Revolution, post-soviet development models and regional trajectories' *European Urban and Regional Studies* 17:2 (2010) pp. 155

188 Ibid pg. 158

189 Ibid pg. 159

190 Slawomir Matuszak and Sarna Arkadiusz, 'From stabilisation to stagnation: Viktor Yanukovych's reforms' *OSW Point of View* 32 (2013) pg. 23

191 Tomas Valasek, 'Ukraine turns away from democracy and the EU,' *Briefing paper, Centre for European Reform (CER)* (2010) pg. 1



cial and political reforms.”<sup>192</sup> One such reform was the transformation of the country’s tax code. Yanukovich’s deputy Prime Minister claimed that this tax reform would make Ukraine’s “the most liberal in Europe,” and were set to become the lowest in Europe for multinational corporations.<sup>193</sup> Taxes for small businesses in particular were to be raised dramatically and pension and welfare benefits, the Ukrainian working class’ prize for the Orange Revolution, were to be cut.<sup>194</sup> These austerity measures were deeply unpopular, and were met with large protests from Ukraine’s entrepreneurs. These protests “blunted the government’s reformist zeal,” leading Yanukovich to veto the law.<sup>195</sup> In a choice between maintaining a careful balance of power or following through with IMF reforms, Yanukovich chose the former. The IMF quickly became unsatisfied with the pace of progress, and cooperation with Ukraine was cut off in 2012. Yanukovich found it difficult to service the country’s debts, and Ukraine dipped back into the recession by the end of the year.<sup>196</sup>

Cut off from financial resources, Yurchenko notes that Ukraine began “a political and economic inward-orientated movement,”<sup>197</sup> based on the launching of a new wave of accumulation by dispossession. This is characterised by “a wave of currently ongoing privatisation of the energy generation and supply sector.”<sup>198</sup> the process for which is blighted by a lack of transparency and preferential treatment for oligarchs close to Yanukovich.<sup>199</sup> The Donetsk based oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, the richest man in post-Soviet space and then a deputy of the Yanukovich’s Party of Regions, exemplifies this process. Akhmetov has gained massively from the Ukrainian state’s withdrawal from the economy, acquiring 50% of the state coal company in 2011. Akhmetov also managed to acquire 30% of Ukraine’s electricity production, and received preferential treatment from the state in the purchase of tenders to export energy to Ukraine’s neighbours.<sup>200</sup> As a result of this process, by the end of 2011 Akhmetov’s yearly income increased from \$17.8 billion to \$25.6 billion, most of which still remains untaxed.<sup>201</sup>

There has been little room for foreign capital in this picture. Akhmetov has also been successful in preventing foreign capitals from enjoying the spoils through his links to the Party of Regions, with Prime Minister Mykola Azarov invalidating the sale of Ukraine’s second largest metallurgical plant to Russian investors as an attempt at an illegal takeover. This was then transferred to Akhmetov’s ownership.<sup>202</sup> Akhmetov is a perfect example of an oligarch standing in the way of international capital’s interests. Through their close linkages with the ruling party and state, Donetsk based oligarchs such as Akhmetov was able to benefit from its dispossession and prevent outsiders from participating.

This is a process Europe wishes to put a stop to, so its financial centres may join in on the spoils. The proposed EUAA calls for the development of “open, competitive and transparent privatisation rules and procedures.”<sup>203</sup> De

192 Matuszak and Arkadiusz, ‘Viktor Yanukovich’s reforms’ pg. 20

193 Roman Olearchyk, ‘Ukraine plans tax reform to attract investors,’ *Financial Times* September 22nd 2010 <https://next.ft.com/content/6d884b30-c623-11df-9cda-00144feab49a> [accessed 8/5/2016]

194 Matuszak and Arkadiusz, ‘Viktor Yanukovich’s reforms’ pp. 25-26

195 Ibid pg. 22

196 Mykhnenko and Adam Swain, ‘Ukraine’s diverging space-economy’ pg. 23

197 Yurchenko “Black Holes” in the Political Economy of Ukraine’ pg. 142

198 Ibid pg. 144

199 Ibid pg. 142

200 Larson, ‘Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine,’ pg. 72

201 Yurchenko “Black Holes” in the Political Economy of Ukraine’ pg. 142

202 Larson, ‘Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine,’ pg. 72

203 EU-Ukraine Cooperation Council, ‘EU-Ukraine Association Agenda to prepare and facilitate the implementation of the Association Agreement’ 24th June 2013 [http://www.londonpressservice.org.uk/haeu/20140422170953/http://eeas.europa.eu/ukraine/docs/e\\_u\\_ukr\\_ass\\_agenda\\_24jun2013.pdf](http://www.londonpressservice.org.uk/haeu/20140422170953/http://eeas.europa.eu/ukraine/docs/e_u_ukr_ass_agenda_24jun2013.pdf) [accessed 8/5/2016] pg. 10

Micco states that its culmination in the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) will commit Ukraine “to addressing certain practices and transactions that could distort free competition and trade, such as cartels, abuse of a dominant position and anti-competitive mergers, which will be subject to effective enforcement action.”<sup>204</sup> Van der Loo advances that the DCFTA's main purpose is to create “a level playing field for economic operators” from both Ukraine and the EU.<sup>205</sup> The primary effect of this level playing field will be to remove the nepotistic protection provided by the Ukrainian state for the oligarchy, and allow Europe to draw its assets into its circuits of capital accumulation, and is emblematic of the EU's technocratic, legalistic approach to imperial expansion.

To conclude, prior to 2008 Europe's solution to overaccumulation consisted of temporally fixing overaccumulated capital in speculative banks on its periphery, which then provided credit fuelled demand for German commodities. Following the Orange Revolution, Ukraine was also drawn into this cycle of speculation and credit-fuelled demand. However, when the 2008 crisis revealed this speculative demand to be built on sand, much of the European periphery (including Ukraine) was pulled into a sovereign debt crisis. Within the Eurozone, European capital's response was to begin practicing a politics of accumulation by dispossession, with previously state-owned passing into the hands of capitals in Europe's core. Through this process, the EU has developed a technocratic style of imperialism, based on the rigid enforcement of free markets in order to ensure these assets to the strongest fragments of European capital. In the face of rising debts, Ukrainian authorities have also launched a new wave of dispossession, but in this case assets have largely passed to fragments of the oligarchy with close links to Yanukovych, with the state actively preventing foreign investors from participating in these ventures. It is these nepotistic links to the Ukrainian state form the basis of the oligarchy's accumulation strategy, and it is this process which the establishment of the EUAA aims to put a stop to. Through this agreement, the EU aims to impose discipline on Ukraine's oligarchy and create a level, transparent playing field for all investors, in which European investors are sure to win.

### c. The unequal roots of Russian imperialism

Russia is a very different case from Europe. While Europe's crisis, and its interests in Ukraine, lie in a process of overaccumulation over 40 years old, Russia has only been a part of the capitalist world system since the 1990s. Indeed, the opening up of the former Soviet Union was a major relief for global capitalism, entailing a massive release of previously unavailable assets into the mainstream of capital accumulation. “What,” asks Harvey “would have happened to overaccumulated capital these last thirty years if these new terrains of accumulation had not opened up?”<sup>206</sup> This has led some Marxist writers, such as Clarke & Annis, to conclude that Russia is part of the “semi-periphery – that is, as one of the majority of countries that...are the targets of imperialist bullying and plunder.”<sup>207</sup> Clarke & Annis advance, like Harvey, that the root of imperialism lies in “the system's over-accumulation of capital and on its resulting compulsion to expand its sphere of operations,” and conclude that “there is no

204 Pasquale de Micco, *When Choosing Means Losing: The Eastern partners, the EU, and the Eurasian Economic Union* (European Parliament Policy Department, Brussels, 2015) pg. 37

205 Guillaume Van der Loo, *The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area: A New Legal Instrument for EU Integration without Membership* (Boston, Brill Nijhoff, 2016) pg. 358

206 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 149

207 Renfrey Clarke and Roger Annis, 'The Myth of "Russian Imperialism": in defence of Lenin's analyses' *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, February 29th 2016 <http://links.org.au/node/4629> [accessed 8/5/2016]

overall surplus of capital in Russia.”<sup>208</sup> As a result, Buzgalin & Kolganov advance that Russia cannot act in an imperialist manner, and its influence can “in some cases be a progressive force, limiting the hegemony of the US and its allies and helping to initiate a consolidation of the world’s anti-hegemonic forces,” despite acknowledging that it is driven by an “especially dangerous Russian Great-Power chauvinism.”<sup>209</sup> This also means that these Marxist writers are unable to explain the current phenomenon of Russian imperialism. At the centre of this drive is Vladimir Putin’s goal of establishing an Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU) “capable of becoming one of the poles in a future multi-polar world.”<sup>210</sup> This project began in 2010 with the establishment of the ECU between Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, which Dragneva & Wolczuk note Putin has been “actively promoting...as an alternative to the EU integration mechanism” for Ukraine.<sup>211</sup> I wish to argue that the roots of this expansionism lie in the overaccumulation of capital in the form of commodities, particularly energy, which require a market for their profitable realisation. It is securing the flow of energy to high demand locations and securing markets for Russian manufactures which has driven Russia’s EaEU, and one which places Ukraine at the centre of its political project.

While the territorial logics of the EaEU, of the reintegration of post-Soviet space back into the Russian sphere of influence, are well documented,<sup>212</sup> its capitalistic logics have been discussed in less detail. Russia’s transformation into a capitalist nation has been marked most of all by its inequality. Between 1991 and 2000, Russia’s Gini coefficient increased from 0.26 to 0.39.<sup>213</sup> While gross profits make up some 40% of GDP, labour’s share of income is just 43%. For comparison, labour’s share of income in the United States stands at 57%.<sup>214</sup> As a result, personal consumption in Russia makes up just under 50% of GDP. For much of the population, this consumption is limited to the bare essentials, with retail researchers finding 60-75% of respondents spend practically all their disposable income on food.<sup>215</sup> As Clarke & Annis note, “there is nowhere in this picture for a broad, prosperous middle class, exercising substantial consumer demand.”<sup>216</sup> With gross capital investment and government purchases taking domestic consumption up to 82% of GDP, Meshikov notes this leaves a full 18% of GDP left in surplus and “has to go on net exports.”<sup>217</sup> As a result of this inequality, there is simply no domestic market for Russian industry - Russian capital must find new markets for its wares abroad.

Menshikov writes that for Russia, such an accumulation strategy “is only possibly if an exorbitant proportion of fuel and raw materials is sold abroad at high prices.”<sup>218</sup> Gaddy & Icke characterises Russia’s relationship to oil rents as an addiction, with everything from industrial production to consumer demand “dependent on oil prices remaining high.”<sup>219</sup> This has made securing markets for gas a top priority. The EU is the key market for Russian gas. Gazprom pro-

208 Ibid

209 Alexander Buzgalin and Andrey Kolganov ‘Russia and Ukraine: oligarchic capitalism, conservative statism, and Right Nationalism’ *Socialist Register* 52 (2015) pg. 168

210 Vladimir Putin, cited in Andrej Krickovic, ‘Imperial nostalgia or prudent geopolitics? Russia’s efforts to reintegrate the post-Soviet space in geopolitical perspective’ *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 30:6 (2014) pg. 503

211 Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk, ‘Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: cooperation, stagnation or rivalry?’ *Chatham House Briefing Paper REP BP 1* (2012) pg. 2

212 Krickovic, ‘Imperial nostalgia or prudent geopolitics?’

213 Stanislav Menshikov, ‘The Anatomy of Russian Capitalism,’ *Challenge* 48:2 (2005) pg. 78

214 Ibid pg. 80

215 Ibid pg. 79

216 Clare and Annis ‘The Myth of “Russian Imperialism”

217 Menshikov, ‘The Anatomy of Russian Capitalism’ pp. 78

218 Ibid pg. 79

219 Clifford G. Gaddy and Barry W. Ickes, ‘Russia after the global financial crisis,’ *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 51:3 (2010) pg. 287

vides the EU with 40% of its gas, and makes up 57% of its sales.<sup>220</sup> Following the global financial crash, European demand for gas collapsed, and with it “so did the underpinnings of the Russian economy.”<sup>221</sup> This crisis was intensified by EU policy choices. After 2009, the EU intensified the liberalisation of its energy supply through the Third Energy Package (TPA).<sup>222</sup> Traditionally, Gazprom has secured markets for itself through long term contracts with other gas monopolies. However, the TPA is based on the de-integration of the national monopolies that Gazprom depends on, and generated increasing uncertainty over the viability of these contracts.<sup>223</sup> As a result, Europe’s gas suppliers are facing increased competition for the European market, a market which is key to the functioning of the Russian economy.<sup>224</sup>

To resolve uncertainty of demand, Russian oil companies must resolve uncertainties elsewhere. Boussena & Locatelli note that increased competition has encouraged Gazprom to “acquire more assets downstream.”<sup>225</sup> By acquiring stakes in transmission companies, Gazprom has the “opportunity to sell their resources without having to face competition on wholesale markets.”<sup>226</sup> As well as allowing Gazprom to capture the profit margins of middlemen in downstream segments, this tightens its control on international pipelines.

This has made Ukraine a key concern. 80% of Russian gas bound for Europe travels through Ukraine’s pipelines.<sup>227</sup> Price disputes between Ukraine and Belarus shut down supply to Europe in 2006 and 2007, which are a major factor in Europe’s liberalisation project.<sup>228</sup> Changing the relationship Russia has to transition states to avoid being held hostage to transit disruptions is a major priority. The ECU, allowing for the easy movement of capital, is key in this. Dreyer & Popescu note that Belarus’ accession put Russian companies “in a better position to get hold of the country’s economic assets.”<sup>229</sup> In 2012, Belarus gave the remaining 50% of its pipeline system to Gazprom in exchange for discounted gas.<sup>230</sup> As a result, Belarus is completely dependent on Russian gas, and pipelines which Svoboda notes are key for “Lithuania, Poland, and beyond,” markets which are highly dependent on Russian gas are secured for Russian capital. In 2010, Gazprom extended an offer to Ukraine of a merger of its state-owned pipeline network Naftogaz. This was rejected and legislation was introduced banning the sale of the network.<sup>231</sup> Since then, Gazprom has been slowly raising the price of Russian gas, exerting great pressure on the ailing Ukrainian economy. According to Shumylo-Tapiola, cheaper gas “will only materialize if Ukraine joins the Customs Union and gives away its gas transit system.”<sup>232</sup> The role dispossession plays in Russian imperialism is as a means of securing energy assets to secure the transit of gas to high demand areas. Russian gas companies place immense pressure on states through withholding

220 Sadek Boussena and Catherine Locatelli, ‘Gas market developments and their effect on relations between Russia and the EU,’ *OPEC Energy Review* 35:1 (2011) pg. 27

221 Gaddy and Ickes, ‘Russia after the global financial crisis,’ pg. 287

222 Boussena and Locatelli, ‘Gas market developments and their effect on relations between Russia and the EU,’ pg. 28

223 Ibid pg. 29

224 Ibid pg. 28

225 Ibid pg. 27

226 Ibid pg. 29

227 Karel Svoboda, ‘Business as Usual? Gazprom’s Pricing Policy Toward the Commonwealth of Independent States’ *Problems of Post-Communism* 58:6 (2011) pg. 30

228 European Parliament, ‘MEPs give green light to further liberalisation of EU electricity and gas markets’ April 22nd 2009 [www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20090421IPR54056+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20090421IPR54056+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN) [accessed 8/5/2016]

229 Iana Dreyer and Nicu Popescu, ‘The Eurasian Customs Union: the economics and the politics,’ *European Union Institute for Security Studies* 11 (2014) pg. 4

230 Shumylo-Tapiola, ‘Ukraine at the Crossroads’ pg. 23

231 Sputnik News, ‘No plans to merge Gazprom and Ukraine’s Naftogaz - Yanukovich’ July 8th 2011 <http://sptnkne.ws/bm7W> [accessed 8/5/2016]

232 Shumylo-Tapiola, ‘Ukraine at the Crossroads’ pg. 24

supplies in order to force this dispossession through. Russia claims that ECU will create a single market with 160 million consumers and integrated transport, pipelines and electricity grid infrastructure.<sup>233</sup> Larson notes that the inclusion of Ukraine in the union would not only “culminate in a powerful geopolitical bloc, but the EU itself would be almost completely reliant upon it for energy and natural resources.”<sup>234</sup>

Gaddy & Icke note that much of Russia’s oil windfall “had been invested in the production sector,” but note that “rather than investing to replace old obsolescent plants, investment merely added to total capacity.” Russia’s oil addiction allowed it to expand inefficient ex-Soviet “dinosaur industries.”<sup>235</sup> With oil rents becoming less secure, these dinosaur industries require markets, and ones which are shielded from more efficient enterprises abroad. Buzgalin & Kolganov note that as Russian transnational companies have grown, they have become increasingly exposed to international competition. Russian oligarchs were “faced with the weak international status of their ‘native’ state, which was unable to sufficiently advance their expansionist ambitions” and soon, “a powerful move to enhance the foreign policy position of Russia emerged.”<sup>236</sup> In this context, Russian expansionism in the form of the ECU begins to make economic sense. Dreyer & Popescu note that since 2010, “most internal trade has been liberalised” between members of the union.<sup>237</sup> Kazakhstan, initially the most economically liberal among the three members, had to raise around half of its tariffs in order to join, with its average applied rate nearly doubling.<sup>238</sup> This has resulted in “measureable, if limited, trade diversion to the detriment of Kazakhstan.” For example, Kazakhstan now imports more expensive cars from Russia and fewer more competitive German, Japanese, and Korean variants, “effectively amounting to the transferring of economic rents to Moscow’s automobile sector” from the rest of the world.<sup>239</sup> One of Moscow’s main fears of the EUAA is an overlap of free trade areas which would allow an influx of tariff free goods from Europe to Russia.<sup>240</sup> Ukraine’s inclusion in the ECU would secure the gateway to Europe, and allow Russia to protect its industries from European commodities while gaining access to the second most populous state in the CIS. The ECU is an effective means of securing markets for Russian industry.

There is also the matter of balancing class conflicts of an unequal society. Buzgalin & Kolganov note that the decline in living standards since the fall of the USSR has produced “resentment towards the few who have become especially wealthy and powerful” among Russia’s working classes.<sup>241</sup> This has produced “hopes for a paternalistic policy implemented by a ‘good tsar,’”<sup>242</sup> which was a role Anderson advances the state could play before 2008 thanks to an unbroken run of “rapid economic growth, rising living standards, political stability and nation-wide popularity.” However, “reduced economic circumstances following the 2008 crash were soon followed by political troubles,” evidenced by large scale demonstrations prior to Putin’s second term.<sup>243</sup> Anderson notes that Putin’s dependence on the oligarchy made it impossible for the state to mobilise support on a “class-political” basis. Instead, the state can do so “only on a culture-war basis, pitting patriotic morals...against the viruses of

233 Ibid pg. 18

234 Larson, ‘Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine’

235 Gaddy and Ickes, ‘Russia after the global financial crisis,’ pg. 295

236 Buzgalin and Kolganov, ‘Russia and Ukraine’ pg. 166

237 Popescu, ‘The Eurasian Customs Union’ pg. 1

238 Ibid pg. 1

239 Ibid pg. 4

240 de Micco, *When Choosing Means Losing* pg. 70

241 Buzgalin and Kolganov, ‘Russia and Ukraine’ pg. 159

242 Perry Anderson, ‘Incommensurate Russia’ *New Left Review* 94 (2015) pg. 13

243 Ibid pg. 14

a foreign-infected decadence.”<sup>244</sup> As Buzgalin & Kolganov observe, the state must continually “shift the blame for internal problems onto external forces,” be they NATO or internal others such as migrants.<sup>245</sup> Ishchenko writes that Russia’s invasion of Crimea is based on “trying to forestall a revolution in Russia,” aiming to boost Putin’s support with “a small, victorious war.”<sup>246</sup> This need to manage internal politics, and the need for the Russian state to assert itself to secure markets for industry, has given Russian imperialism its chauvinistic character.

Therefore, the root of Russian imperialism lies in the severe inequality that developed during its transition to capitalism. This has created a capitalism which is political unstable and highly dependent on exports, especially of gas. Both these factors reached crisis point after the 2008 Financial Crash. The purpose of the ECU is therefore threefold: assert Russian state power, placating patriotic citizens; transform Russia’s periphery into a safe and accessible market for Russian exports, particularly for uncompetitive industries; and lastly, dispossessing peripheral states of their energy infrastructure to ensure a reliable flow of Russian gas to the European market. This is an imperialism, therefore, which has had to resolve its crises, both political and economic, through the extension of state power into its periphery. This has resulted in an imperialism which is nationalistic, statist, and revanchist in essence.

To conclude this section, while both the European Union and the Russian Federation have faced severe crises of overaccumulation since the 2008 Financial Crisis, these have taken different forms. Consequently, these crises have required different solutions, and spawned different characters of imperialism. In Europe, we have a chronic case of overaccumulation of capital without means of investment, while in Russia we have an overaccumulation of commodities, especially gas, without secure markets, and a restive population. The EU’s solution, based on accumulation by dispossession in its periphery, has generated an imperialism which is technocratic and legalistic. Meanwhile, Russia’s solution has been the securing of markets and the dispossession of pipelines through an assertion of Russian state. As a state whose transition to capitalism is only part complete, and one which acts as the gateway between Russia and its main market for gas in the EU, Ukraine is key for both of these competing imperial powers.

#### IV. Dispossession during the Civil War

For the oligarchy, neither the EUAA nor the ECU was an appealing choice. As Larson notes, unfettered Russian manipulation of the gas supply and unprotected access to the Ukrainian market would “impose sharp limitations on Ukraine’s economic sovereignty.” Meanwhile, the reforms demanded by the EUAA would “reverse the oligarchs’ direct dominance over the state,” and open it up to Western investment. Therefore, “maintaining the balancing act between imperialisms...has been the domestic and foreign policy interest driving the oligarchic bloc.”<sup>247</sup> Cadier echoes this, noting that the Ukrainian leadership “had for years made its strategy precisely to consistently avoid making such a choice.”<sup>248</sup> As well as maintaining the oligarchy’s power, Yanukovych

244 Anderson, ‘Incommensurate Russia’ pg. 16

245 Buzgalin and Kolganov, ‘Russia and Ukraine’ pg. 159

246 Volodymyr Ishchenko, ‘Ukraine’s Fractures’ *New Left Review* 87 (2014) pp. 23-24

247 Larson, ‘Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine’ pg. 74

248 David Cadier, ‘Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU-Russia competition in the shared neighbourhood and the Ukraine crisis’ *Global Policy* 5:1 (2014) pg. 81

also aimed to “raise the stakes and maximise [the contradiction’s] potential benefits”<sup>249</sup> by playing the two blocs off against each other.

However, by 2013 this situation had become untenable. Without the IMF support and pressured by the rising price of gas, Larson notes that Ukraine’s crisis “reached its pinnacle, fusing mounting economic and social discontent as they moved toward the surface.”<sup>250</sup> Yanukovych needed a bailout, and therefore had to choose one of the power blocs. In the end, Yanukovych accepted the Russian bailout but, as Cadier notes, was careful not to pledge to join the ECU.<sup>251</sup> Therefore, as Larson notes, accepting Russian aid was “the last attempt by the oligarchy to defer the imperialist contradiction,”<sup>252</sup> taking the path of least resistance which offended the fewest interest groups. However, this was too little, too late. Workers in the West of the country associated the EUAA with “the illusion that joining the European Union will bring them prosperity and a decent standard of living (an illusion held as well by millions in Greece and other southern European countries).”<sup>253</sup> Yanukovych’s compromise proved “utterly impotent in the face of a social upheaval whose time had come.”<sup>254</sup> In the ensuing protests, Yanukovych’s administration was swept away. In this section, I will examine the impact this crisis has had on dispossession in the Ukraine and on the balance between the competing imperial powers.

#### **a. Privatisation – the failure to dispossess the state**

The EUAA was signed on 27th June 2014, with the DCFTA put into operation on 1st January 2016.<sup>255</sup> However, despite the efforts of actors involved, it has had little impact on privatisation processes in Ukraine. In May 2015, Ukraine’s cabinet approved a list of 300 state-owned entities for privatisation.<sup>256</sup> Aivaras Abromavičius, one of the main drivers of privatisation who quit his job at a Swedish capital firm to become Ukraine’s Minister for Economy, stated these deals were designed to appeal to “Strategic [i.e., Western] investors with a good reputation.”<sup>257</sup> The European Commission welcomed this, stating that it “actively wants to support the ongoing process of privatisation and marketisation in the Ukraine,” and provided €1.8 million and consultants to assist the process.<sup>258</sup> This deal included Centrenergo, Ukraine’s state electricity company, which a consortium of Western investors advised by Dragon Capital, a Ukrainian fund with a stake in Goldman Sachs.<sup>259</sup> However, the process was hampered by numerous delays, which Abromavičius justified by “if we hurried to conduct the privatization, it would not have been done in a way we would like it to be.”<sup>260</sup> The process proved too slow for the consortium, with Dragon Capital reporting they had lost patience and given up on the purchase by the end of

249 Cadier, ‘Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union?’ pg. 81

250 Larson, ‘Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine’ pg. 74

251 Cadier, ‘Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union?’ pg. 81

252 Larson, ‘Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine’ pg. 74

253 Joanne Landy, ‘Ukraine Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Is there a way out?’ *New Politics* 15:57 (2014) pg. 60

254 Larson, ‘Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine’ pg. 74

255 EU Trade office, ‘The trade part of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement becomes operational on 1 January 2016’ December 31, 2015 [trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1425](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1425) [accessed 8/5/2016]

256 Maksym Popovych ‘Rethinking Privatisation of Energy Assets in Ukraine’ *New Eastern Europe* August 21st 2015 [neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1695-rethinking-privatisation-of-energy-assets-in-ukraine](http://neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1695-rethinking-privatisation-of-energy-assets-in-ukraine) [accessed 8/5/2016]

257 Margarita Antidze ‘Ukraine eyes strategic investors in selloff of state-owned assets’ *Reuters* May 15th 2015 [www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-economy-investment-idUSL5N0Y631U20150515](http://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-economy-investment-idUSL5N0Y631U20150515) [accessed 8/5/2016]

258 European Commission, ‘Assistance for Privatisation in Ukraine’ October 22nd 2015 [europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-92-746\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-92-746_en.htm) [accessed 8/5/2016]

259 Alessandra Prentice, ‘Investors wonder if Ukrainian privatisation will ever materialise’ *Reuters* April 13th 2016 [www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-investors-idUSL5N17D0DX](http://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-investors-idUSL5N17D0DX) [accessed 8/6/2016]

260 Ukraine Today, ‘Ukraine kicks off large-scale privatisation’ January 25th 2016 [uatoday.tv/business/ukraine-kicks-off-large-scale-privatisation-577922.html](http://uatoday.tv/business/ukraine-kicks-off-large-scale-privatisation-577922.html) [accessed 8/6/2016]

2015. In the end, Abromavičius resigned, citing pressure from the ruling party to appoint “dubious people” at state-controlled companies.<sup>261</sup> For the most part, dispossession through privatisation has simply not surfaced and new European agreements have been unable to break the oligarchy’s capture of the state.

## **b. Dispossession of Ukrainian and Russian businesses**

In the meantime, dispossession has taken other forms. As mentioned earlier, Harvey notes the importance of crisis in facilitating dispossession, particularly by large capitalists of smaller capitalists.<sup>262</sup> This occurs in times of political as well as financial crisis, as demonstrated by Ukraine’s agribusinesses. Fraser notes that with the onset of the political crisis, “several of these mostly Ukrainian-based companies have descended into crisis themselves.”<sup>263</sup> Most notably, the companies facing the deepest crises were those incorporated into tax havens with the most connection to international capital, where domination by the oligarchy sat uneasily alongside “a mix of domestic and foreign investment.”<sup>264</sup> A notable example is MRIYA Agro-Holding, one of Ukraine’s largest land-bank of under the domination of the Guta family.<sup>265</sup> When the company failed to service its Eurobonds in the summer of 2014, MRIYA’s creditors ousted the oligarchy’s management team, and placed it under their control.<sup>266</sup>

Russian capital, previously desperate to acquire gas transmission assets, is being progressively driven out of this sector in both Ukraine and Europe. Russia’s largest independent company, LUKoil, announced in July 2014 that its filling station network would be sold to AMIC, an Austrian firm. The announcement came shortly after the blockade of LUKoil gas stations by members of the Ukrainian ultranationalist group Pravy Sektor, who reportedly “threatened gas station employees that they would return with more attacks with the end goal of completely ousting the company from Ukraine.”<sup>267</sup> This has gone beyond Ukraine, with LUKoil abandoning its operations in Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia citing “anti-Russian sentiment.”<sup>268</sup> These assets too will be passing to AMIC.<sup>269</sup> Sanctions have also been a powerful means of limiting Russian capital in Europe. By shutting Russian state banks out of the European financial centres Russian businesses in Ukraine and wider Europe have been left without sources of finance.<sup>270</sup> Russian capital, in highly profitable sectors which it was previously seeking to expand in has, through the use of political violence and state sanctions, been forced to retreat, their assets passing into the hands of European capital.

261 Kateryna Choursina and Daryna Krasnolutska 'Ukrainian Economy Minister Quits as Government Cracks Widen' *Bloomberg* February 3rd 2016 [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-02-03/ukraine-economy-minister-abromavicius-resigns-citing-pressure](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-02-03/ukraine-economy-minister-abromavicius-resigns-citing-pressure) [accessed 8/5/2016]

262 Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, pg. 198

263 Elizabeth Fraser, 'Who Owns Agricultural Land in Ukraine?' Oakland Institute May 8th 2015 [www.oaklandinstitute.org/who-owns-agricultural-land-ukraine](http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/who-owns-agricultural-land-ukraine) [accessed 8/5/2016]

264 Ibid

265 Ibid

266 Andrew Langley and Agnes Lovasz, 'Ukraine Bailout: What Will It Take to Dodge Default in Wartime?' *Bloomberg* February 9th 2015 <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-02-09/ukraine-bailout-what-will-it-take-to-dodge-default-in-wartime-> [accessed 8/5/2016]

267 Russia Today, 'Lukoil offloads 240 Ukraine gas stations to Austrian buyer' July 31st 2014 <https://www.rt.com/business/176936-lukoil-sells-ukraine-gas-stations/> [accessed 8/5/2016]

268 Julianne Geiger 'Anti-Russian Sentiment Pushes Lukoil Out of Baltics' *OilPrice.com* February 10th 2016 <http://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Anti-Russian-Sentiment-Pushes-Lukoil-Out-Of-Baltics.html> [accessed 8/5/2016]

269 Amic Energy Management, 'AMIC Energy acquires LUKOIL's fuel retail businesses in Lithuania, Latvia and Poland' February 5th 2016 [www.amicenergy.com/pdf/20160205\\_AMIC\\_Press\\_Release\\_AMIC\\_signs\\_LUK\\_LI\\_LV\\_PL.pdf](http://www.amicenergy.com/pdf/20160205_AMIC_Press_Release_AMIC_signs_LUK_LI_LV_PL.pdf) [accessed 8/5/2016]

270 Radio Free Europe, 'Russia's LUKoil Pulls Out of Three Central European States,' August 4th 2015 [www.rferl.org/content/russia-lukoil-sanctions/25480914.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-lukoil-sanctions/25480914.html) [accessed 8/5/2016]



### c. Accumulation by Dispossession in the Agricultural Sector

It is worth considering agriculture more closely. Ukraine has over 32 million hectares of arable land, equivalent to roughly one third of the arable land in the entire EU. Furthermore, the land is of high quality, possessing 25% of the world's highly fertile *Chernozem* black soil.<sup>271</sup> The question of who controls "the breadbasket of Europe" is, according to Mittell and Moore, "constitute a critical factor that has been often overlooked" in conventional narratives on the Ukraine crisis.<sup>272</sup>

Due to a moratorium on land sales enforced in 2001, most of Ukraine's Chernozem is owned by Ukraine's 7 million smallholders.<sup>273</sup> Peasants are concentrated mostly in the west of the country, which Åslund notes suffers from labour shortages in the big cities. Resolving this labour shortage "could rapidly stimulate the West."<sup>274</sup> As Marx notes, the working class "became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production...the expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant from the soil, is the basis of the whole process."<sup>275</sup> We can observe this process by examining the reorganisation of Ukraine's VAT system as mandated by the IMF.<sup>276</sup> Peasants in Ukraine receive few state supports outside the Special VAT regime, which provides small farmers with tax rebates to purchase farming inputs.<sup>277</sup> However, as Betily notes, the regime "de facto leads to lower farm-gate prices and smaller investment incentives for companies."<sup>278</sup> Fraser notes that if this is cut, not only will small farmers lose an important subsidy, but the new system "will involve crippling new accounting and administrative requirements that only large agribusinesses can shoulder."<sup>279</sup> Abolishing the VAT regime would force the least efficient of Ukraine's peasants off the land, converting them into proletarians for the labour starved west, and provide incentives for these lands to be put to use by European capital.

Mamonova notes that Ukraine has long been the target of land grabs, having been classified by the World Bank as a "land rich, finance poor" country, but notes that the distinguishing feature of the peasantry's response "lies in the near-absent overt protests."<sup>280</sup> However, the response to the IMF's abolition of the special VAT regime was not docile acceptance. Prior to the passage of the law in late December, Western Ukraine was wracked by roadblocks led by striking farmers under the slogan "without the village, there is no state!"<sup>281</sup>

271 Christina Plank, 'Land Grabs in the Black Earth: Ukrainian Oligarchs and International Investors' in Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and People's Struggles in Europe ed. Jennifer Franco & Saturnino M. Borras Jr. (Amsterdam, Transnational Institute for European Coordination, 2013) pp. 182-190

272 Jettie Word, Alice Martin-Prével, and Frédéric Mousseau, 'Walking on the West Side: The World Bank and the IMF in the Ukraine Conflict' *The Oakland Institute* (2014) [www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/OurBiz\\_Brief\\_Ukraine.pdf](http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/OurBiz_Brief_Ukraine.pdf) [accessed 8/5/2016] pg. 4

273 Natalia Mamonova, 'Challenging the dominant assumptions about peasants' responses to land grabbing: "Politics from below" in Ukraine,' *Land Deal Politics Initiative* (2012) pg. 7

274 Åslund, 'The economic policy of Ukraine after the Orange Revolution,' pg. 334

275 Karl Marx [1867], *Capital Volume I* ed. and trans. Ben Fowkes (London, Penguin Classics, 1990) pg. 876

276 Elizabeth Fraser, 'The Future of Ukrainian Small Farmers under Threat under the IMF Mandate' *Oakland Institute* February 4th 2016 [www.oaklandinstitute.org/future-ukrainian-small-farmers](http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/future-ukrainian-small-farmers) [accessed 8/5/2016]

277 Oleksandra Betily, *VAT in Agriculture: Ukrainian experience and international evidence* (Berlin, German-Ukrainian Agricultural Policy Dialogue, 2014) pg. 3

278 Ibid pg. 3

279 Fraser, 'The Future of Ukrainian Small Farmers under Threat under the IMF Mandate'

280 Mamonova, 'Challenging the dominant assumptions about peasants' responses to land grabbing' pg. 1

281 TASS, 'Ukrainian farmers block roads in five regions to protest hikes in taxes and changes to special taxation regimes' *The New Cold War: Ukraine and beyond* December 28th 2015 <https://new-coldwar.org/protests-and-road-blockages-by-farmers-across-ukraine-against-tax-hikes/> [accessed 8/5/2016]

These protests forced the government to compromise and preserve the VAT regime at least until the end of 2016.<sup>282</sup>

Harvey advances that as accumulation by dispossession becomes “the primary contradiction within the imperialist organization of capital accumulation,”<sup>283</sup> we begin to see the “emergence of a different kind of politics of resistance.”<sup>284</sup> The politics of these resisters are often diffuse, reflecting the “inchoate, fragmentary, and contingent forms taken by accumulation by dispossession.”<sup>285</sup> As dispossession takes multiple forms, so do the dispossessed, and their resistance manifests in contradictory manners. Ishchenko advances that the Euromaidan itself “was to some extent a movement of dispossessed workers.”<sup>286</sup> That this movement became one of competing imperialisms, rather than against dispossession is for Anderson “rooted in the fact that the working class did not appear under its own banner...which meant that the democratic uprising lacked a socio-economic, let alone an anti-capitalist, dimension.”<sup>287</sup> But with the peasants’ strike in late 2015, we begin to see Ukraine’s dispossessed, after decades of manipulation by oligarchic and international capital alike, start to fight for its own class interests. Harvey advances that with these embryonic struggles against accumulation by dispossession “it should be possible to build outwards into a broader politics...mobilised against the dominant regime of neo-liberal imperialism foisted upon the world by the hegemonic capitalist powers.”<sup>288</sup> As accumulation by dispossession becomes central to the mechanism of the world economy, struggles against dispossession become stronger and central to anti-capitalist resistance.

## V. Conclusion: Accumulation by Dispossession and Imperial Competition

With this dissertation, I have intended to show that the Ukraine crisis, rather than solely a product of the geopolitical wills of European commissioners desiring to create a ring of friendly states<sup>289</sup> or of a revanchist Russian administration seeking to create a “Russkiy Mir” in the “near abroad”<sup>290</sup> of the former Soviet Union, is intrinsically linked to the solutions to problems of political economy these entities have followed in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

Europe faces an overaccumulation of capital which has been a chronic problem since the 1970s. Unable to find profitable means of investing productively, and with temporal solutions no longer being able to successfully defer the realisation of uninvested capital, the EU has embarked on a spatial solution through accumulation by dispossession. The privatisation of assets previously seen as outside of capital accumulation transforms them into commodities which overaccumulated capital can immediately “seize hold of...and immediately put to profitable use.”<sup>291</sup> This is the essence of Harvey’s concept of accumulation by dispossession. This has drawn Europe to Ukraine’s partial transformed, banditry based economy, much of which remains outside the realms of

282 Interfax-Ukraine ‘Parliament approves VAT Compromise for farmers’ December 25th 2015 en.interfax.com.ua/news/economic/313903.html [accessed 8/5/2016]

283 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 172

284 Ibid, pg. 172

285 Ibid pp. 173-174

286 Ishchenko, ‘Ukraine’s Fractures’ pg. 20

287 Kevin B. Anderson, ‘Ukraine: Democratic Aspirations and Inter-imperialist Rivalry’ *New Politics* 15:57 (2014) pg. 66

288 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pp. 179-180

289 Rosa Balfour and Antonio Missiroli, *Reassessing the European Neighbourhood Policy* (Brussels, European Policy Centre, 2007) pg. 10

290 Michał Wawrzonek ‘Ukraine in the “Gray Zone”: Between the “Russkiy Mir” and Europe’ *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 20:10 (2014) pg. 3

291 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 149

formal capital accumulation. In order to carry this out, the EU has developed a technocratic regulatory framework with which allow it to dispossess its member-states in the name of “fiscal discipline.” It is in the context of this technocratic imperialism that it relates to indebted nations outside of its borders. By drawing Ukraine into a EUAA, European imperialism aims to impose discipline on the country’s oligarchy and set a “level playing field” for privatisation which its capital-rich companies are sure to win.

Russia’s case is somewhat different. For Russia, the problem at hand is a case of overaccumulation in the form of commodities, especially gas. Increased competition in the crucial European market has caused Russia to seek to secure the transfer of energy through the dispossession of energy assets in the near abroad, as well protecting markets for other industries through the establishment of the ECU. This imperial strategy also allows the Russian administration to balance the class conflicts of a highly unequal society, and gives the Russian imperialism its chauvinistic edge. These factors have made Ukraine, whose economy has only semi-transitioned to capitalism and acts as the cross-roads between East and West, a key interest of both these states. The conflict is often portrayed as a clash of Russian nationalism and European liberalism, but the roots of both lie in political economy.

It is, of course, an ongoing dispute, and therefore hard to predict where events will go. While Russian capital has largely lost in this crisis, the Russian state remains more secure than ever. Riding a wave of ultranationalism, Putin’s administration has an approval rating of 89%.<sup>292</sup> Territorial goals of seizing Sevastopol and balancing internal class conflicts through revanchism have won over those of capital accumulation. In Ukraine, post-EUAA there is concern that trumpeted privatisation deals are simply not surfacing; and the compromise over the special VAT regime for peasants remains only that. Prime Minister Yatsenyuk resigned in April over his inability to pass IMF demanded austerity measures through the Ukrainian parliament.<sup>293</sup> Resistance is also brewing in Europe’s core over the extension of the EUAA. A referendum on the EUAA carried out in the Netherlands was rejected by 62% of voters. All of this shows that this conflict is far from over and its outcome far from determined. It is a contested process, and a contradiction which will intensify as this process deepens.

I have argued that the conflict in Ukraine is, ultimately, a conflict of rival capitalist powers seeking solutions to their crisis by turning to regions external of themselves. This is both territorially speaking, and also capitalistically speaking, referring to both states outside their borders and sectors of society outside the formal realm of capital accumulation. But as Harvey notes, there is “in the long run, no outer resolution to the internal contradictions of capitalism.”<sup>294</sup> In dispossessing the global commons, the factors which produced the original crisis, the endless accumulation of capital, are reproduce and the problem of overaccumulation is sure to re-emerge. As Marx states, seeking external solutions to capital’s internal contradictions merely “transfers the contradictions to a wider sphere,”<sup>295</sup> for it to emerge at a later date and on a far grander scale. Instead, for Harvey, the only solution is an internal transformation which “forcibly weans society away from accumulation for accumulation’s sake and looks to mobilize natural and human capacities in the quest for freedom”<sup>296</sup> - in short,

292 Damien Sharkov 'Putin's approval rating will be the last to fall, says pollster' *Newsweek* January 20th 2016 [europe.newsweek.com/putin-approval-rating-last-fall-pollster-417707](http://europe.newsweek.com/putin-approval-rating-last-fall-pollster-417707) [accessed 8/5/2016]

293 Reuters, 'Ukrainian PM Yatseniuk resigns, paving way for new government' April 10th 2016 [www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-yatseniuk-idUSKCN0X70JO](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-yatseniuk-idUSKCN0X70JO) [accessed 8/5/2016]

294 Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, pg. 414

295 Karl Marx [1885], *Capital Volume II* (New York, International Publishers, 1967) pg. 408

296 Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, pg. 414

the establishment of a socialist mode of production. But until this new resolution is created, this dispossession will continue, with these cannibalistic practices becoming a “much more central feature within global capitalism.”<sup>297</sup> Capital will be compelled to bring ever more sectors within its logic, inside and outside national boundaries. This has severe consequences for international relations. As Luxemburg notes, it is this rush for non-capitalist environs which produces “universally sharpened world competition between the capitalist states for the last remaining non-capitalist areas on earth”<sup>298</sup> as rival capitalist powers compete for the right to dispossess the global commons. It is this process, of imperialist competition over the right to dispossess, that has manifested itself in Ukraine.

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297 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pg. 67

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